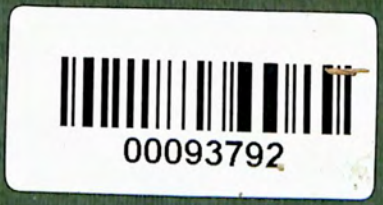
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BEAUMARCHAIS

AND HIS TIMES.

SKETCHES OF FRENCH SOCIETY

IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

FROM UNPUBLISHED DOCUMENTS.

BY

LOUIS DE LOMÉNIE.

TRANSLATED BY HENRY S. EDWARDS.

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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TO

M. J. J. AMPERE,

OF THE FRENCH ACADEMY,

PROFESSOR OF MODERN FRENCH LITERATURE AT THE COLLEGE OF FRANCE.

My dear Friend,

Permit me to dedicate to you this work, which has cost me more labor than any of my others. Owing to the value of the documents which it contains, it will, perhaps, not fall at once into oblivion. If it should be its privilege to live for some short period, it would be very gratifying to me to think that, at the same time, it caused this public testimonial to live, of the profound esteem and the heartfelt and grateful affection which your deputy at the College of France entertains for you.

Louis de Loménie.

Paris, November 15, 1855.

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PREFACE.

We are indebted for the unpublished documents which appear in this work to MM. Delarue and Alfred Delarue de Beaumarchais, son-in-law and grandson of the author of the "Marriage of Figaro," who have been kind enough to intrust us with all the papers left by their father-in-law and grandfather. The abundance of these materials, the condition of which is spoken of in the Introduction, has led us to make our work one of considerable bulk. If it be reflected that no "Memoirs of Beaumarchais" exist, that the two volumes which are known as the "Mémoires de Beaumarchais" are judicial pleadings, written in reference to law-suits, having nothing in common with Memoirs of the author's life; if it be considered that Beaumarchais was one of the most active, and one of the best known men of his century, and that he had his share of influence in the events which

preceded the Revolution, the public will not be astonished at our forming these volumes out of the unpublished documents, when, if we had chosen to adopt the system of amplification pursued in the present day, they would have easily furnished us with the matter of twice as many. Our object, then, has been to be as concise as possible, and to choose from among the numerous documents beneath our eyes, those which appeared best calculated to interest the public.

Nor did we think of exaggerating the importance of the part taken by Beaumarchais in the affairs of his times, although we have become convinced that this part was more considerable than people have hitherto thought. It will be seen, without trouble, that we have not only endeavoured to narrate the life of the author of the "Marriage of Figaro," but we have also endeavoured to paint the epoch in which he lived; and, while presenting his stormy and eccentric career in its true light, to link with it all the facts, all the incidents of a more general nature, which appeared calculated to throw some new light over either the politics, the ideas, or the manners of the eighteenth century. We were undertaking one of those detailed and complete

biographies of the English school, in which extracts are mixed up with the narrative, in order to throw light upon it, and corroborate it, in which historical and literary reflections are connected with pictures of private life, and in which the author endeavours to present an *ensemble* at once instructive, interesting, and rigorously exact.

To reach this triple object of our endeavours, we had many difficulties to resolve. The first consisted in the proportions to be maintained between the extracts and the narrative; the English biographers make rather too great a use of their documents; they do not always pay enough attention to the movement of the narrative, to the sequence of the connecting points between the different parts of a work, and their productions sometimes exhibit incoherence and heaviness.

The inverse process, which is the most used in France, consists, when the writer has a large quantity of documents at his disposition, in quoting very little, in taking up all the materials he possesses, and moulding them into a personal narrative, in which he always speaks in his own name, and endeavours, principally, to make his exposition interesting. This process has its advantage; but it also

offers inconveniences, which have determined us only to adopt it partially, although its execution would have been more easy than that of the mixed plan we at last determined upon.

While seeking in the papers of Beaumarchais for precise notions on the character, mind, manners, the domestic and social life of an entire epoch, and finding in them facts which were unknown, and the more valuable from their appearing sometimes improbable, although perfectly true, it struck us, that if we yielded to the temptation of taking all these facts, and clothing them throughout in a form of our own, besides the risk of altering their character involuntarily, by depriving them of the colour of the period, we should be exposing ourselves to the publication of a work which would have resembled those apocryphal memoirs in which some details possessing truth are mixed up with all sorts of inventions, and the perusal of which is to us insupportable; for, if we have a great esteem for a good romance, when it is published as such, nothing is so repugnant to us as a pretended historical work which has to be read with caution, it being necessary to inquire at each page where the history finishes and the romance begins.

Judging of the public taste by our own, we wished above all to offer it a work, the exactness of which could never appear doubtful; in order to obtain this result, we have not shrunk before the necessity of giving partial or complete extracts from a sufficiently large number of unpublished documents, with the object of corroborating our own narrative, by impressing upon it the stamp of truth. We thought that a biography of the author of the "Marriage of Figaro," surrounded by a general picture of the eighteenth century, could not but gain, if we allowed not only the principal personage, but also the very different personages with whom he was in relation, to speak frequently in their own words.

On the other hand, we were much afraid of fatiguing the reader by the number and unconnected nature of the extracts; we took every possible care in selecting, curtailing, and connecting whatever we borrowed from Beaumarchais' papers, in order to make all his extracts enter into the text, and dispose them so that our narrative instead of being overwhelmed by them, might be followed not only with confidence, but also with interest. Those persons who are accustomed to literary labours will perhaps grant, that it is more diffi-

cult for a writer thus to interpolate documents in his work, while varying his methods of connection and transition incessantly, than to give free course to his pen, while appropriating and transforming, more or less, all he borrows. In a word, we have endeavoured in this work to combine two modes of composition; one of which sacrifices the agreeable to the true, while the other aims, above all, at the agreeable. If the critics do us the honour to pay attention to our performance, we hope they will allow for the difficulties of this combination.

We found another cause for embarrassment in the advantage we possessed in being able to add to our resources the valuable assistance afforded by Beaumarchais' papers. This assistance made us hesitate more than once between the fear of failing in our obligations to be sincere—which are imposed upon every writer possessing self-respect—and that of not quite fulfilling the wishes of a very honourable family which was giving us a mark of confidence for which we are very grateful, but which, nevertheless, we had only accepted on the express condition that we should use our own discretion in our assertions and remarks. We think we can testify, that in endeavouring to conciliate these two duties as much as pos-

sible, we have, nevertheless, made every other consideration subservient to the demands of our own conscience, and when it appeared necessary to us to choose between the two, we have not hesitated. If, then, this performance leaves much to be desired, it appears to us to possess, nevertheless, a character which is rarely presented by biographical works executed under similar circumstances. It is a biography composed after family papers, and not a panegyric. The source from which the documents were obtained, has not caused the writer to abandon his independence. It is the reporter who speaks, and not the advocate; this reporter will probably be accused by more than one reader, who is prejudiced against Beaumarchais, of not having laid enough stress on the blameable portions of his life; but he will, probably, also be considered too impartial by persons to whom ties of relationship and gratitude inspire a legitimate regard for the memory of the author of the "Marriage of Figaro." However, as we do not doubt but that the general effect of this conscientious study of a much calumniated man will be altogether very favourable to his memory, we are pleased to think that the family of Beaumarchais will acknowledge, that while we have not concealed the weak sides of the celebrated

personage whose life we are relating, we have employed the only means which could lead the reader to appreciate the excellent qualities of his heart, and the very remarkable faculties with which Nature had endowed him.

The first experience we obtained of the inclinations of the public, by inserting our performance in the "Revue des deux Mondes," confirmed us in the opinion which we have just expressed, and encouraged us to reprint it, after devoting much time to going over it, so as to render it more worthy of the kind reception it had received. Certain portions have been almost completely remodelled and rewritten, particularly that which treats of the most important and last known part of Beaumarchais' life; we allude to his intervention in the events which preceded the formation of the United States of America, and his relations with this new nation.

The two articles which we gave to the "Revue" on the subject were somewhat discordant, which proceeded from our having already published one, when, after persevering researches at the Archives des Affaires Etrangéres, we at last succeeded in discovering the entire truth on so important a point. The result was, that the second article modified very considerably

the views expressed in the first. Now that we are reprinting our articles in a complete form, we have endeavoured to make the different portions of this statement agree, and to present the whole affair in as clear a light as possible.

Let us add another word as to the manner in which we have made use of our documents. Generally speaking, we have made it a rule only to quote unpublished papers; under some circumstances only, and when it appeared to us that any given page, though already published, was indispensable to the interest or truth of a picture, we have thought it right to reproduce it. Those unpublished documents which, while presenting a certain value, could not enter into the body of our work without overloading it, have been consigned to the Appendix.

All our extracts are scrupulously exact. We have confined ourselves, from time to time, to a few curtailments. The aim of these curtailments has never been to modify the meaning of a document, but only to abridge what was too long, or to suppress passages which were too free. The line of conduct to follow in the latter case was not always easy to determine. If we had made a point of cutting out everything which went more or less beyond bounds,

we should have gone too far from the object of our work, which was to depict, at the same time, the man and the century. Who does not understand, indeed, that certain forms of speech, and certain episodes, have their importance as elements to the appreciation of the spirit of an epoch? On the other hand, if we had not used any reserve in extracts of this kind, we should have incurred the danger of giving to our book the attraction of impropriety. Now, a success purchased at such a price has never been the object of our ambition.

Between these two shoals we have endeavoured to keep a medium course, and we have more than once sacrificed details out of respect to propriety, which a less scrupulous painter of manners would perhaps have preserved. However, if severe minds should find that we have even now not sufficiently mutilated our documents, we beg them to take into consideration the exigencies of the subject. We beg them also not to forget that a frivolous picture, which is at the same time characteristic and true, often produces serious impressions; by, as it were, probing the faults of an epoch, it promotes useful comparisons and salutary reflections.

In conclusion, we count upon the equity of the

reader for not making us responsible for the ideas, sentiments, and tastes of Beaumarchais and his times, except in those cases in which, by direct or indirect approval, we assume their responsibility ourselves.

L. DE L.

BEAUMARCHAIS AND HIS TIMES.

INTRODUCTION.

A GARRET IN THE RUE DU PAS-DE-LA-MULE.—STATE OF THE PAPERS LEFT BY BEAUMARCHAIS.—GUDIN, THE PUNCTUAL MAN.—BEAUMARCHAIS' FIRST WORK OF ART.—PORTRAIT OF A LADY.—BEAUMARCHAIS' PREVIOUS BIOGRAPHERS.

ACCOMPANIED by a grandson of Beaumarchais, I one day entered a house in the Rue du Pas-de-la-Mule. We went upstairs to a garret into which no one had penetrated for several years, and on opening the door—which was not done without difficulty—raised a cloud of dust which almost suffocated us. I ran to the window for air; but, like the door, the window had so completely lost the habit of opening, that it resisted all my efforts: the wood, swollen and rotten from dampness, threatened to fall to pieces beneath my hand, when I took the wise resolution of breaking two of the panes, and we were at length able to breathe and cast our eyes freely around us. The little room was covered with boxes and cases filled with papers. Before me, in this uninhabited and silent

cell—beneath this thick layer of dust, I had all that remained of one of the most lively wits—of one of the most noisy, agitated, and varied existences which belonged to the last century. I had before me all the papers left fifty-four years ago by the author of the "Marriage of Figaro."

When the superb mansion built by Beaumarchais, on the boulevard which bears his name, was sold and pulled down, his papers were removed to a neighbouring house, and shut up in the room where I found them. The presence of a brush and of a few gloves, intended to preserve the hands from dust, showed that from time to time visits had been paid to the room. By degrees these visits had become more rare, death having taken away in succession the widow and daughter of Beaumarchais. His son-in-law and grandchildren, fearing the documents might fall into negligent or hostile hands, had resolved to let them lie in peace; and thus valuable materials for the history of the eighteenth century—thus all the souvenirs of an extraordinary career had remained buried for more than twenty years in a deserted cell, the aspect of which filled me with a profound melancholy. In disturbing the rest of this heap of papers, yellow with age, written or received in former times in anger or in joy by a being who—as Madame de Staël said of Mirabeau—was so strongly animated, so fully in possession of life, it seemed as if I was

performing an exhumation. I fancied I saw one of those tombs in Perè la Chaise which, although visited frequently in the first instance, become at last covered with nettles, reminding us incessantly of the forgetfulness which follows us on this earth, from which we pass so rapidly.

One portion, however, of the papers had been arranged with care: it was that which related to the numerous and varied transactions of Beaumarchais as pleader, merchant, shipowner, contractor for government stores and administrator.* The other portion,

* When Beaumarchais had become rich, and enjoyed the reputation of being a man of universal attainments, he had every plan, every project, in whatever brain it might have originated, addressed to him, in hopes that his co-operation might be obtained. Some notion may be formed of the number from the following list, which only embraces the contents of a single portfolio.

State of the different Projects submitted to the Consideration of M. de Beaumarchais.

Project of a loan for the Duke de Chartres, 1784. Copy of the patent authorizing the Duke de Choiseul to borrow 400,000 francs, 1783. Project of a universal system of criminal legislation. Observations on the means of acquiring land in Scioto. Document for the associated proprietors of the inclosure of the Quinze-Vingts. Notes on the civil existence of Protestants in France. Project of a loan equally beneficial to the king and to the public. Prospectus of a mill to be established at Harfleur. Project of a communication with India by the Isthmus of Suez. Paper on the conversion of peat into coal, and on the advantages of this discovery. Papers containing a plan for giving the king twenty vessels of the line and twelve frigates, to serve as escort for trading vessels to the colonies. Paper on the plantation of rhubarb. Prospectus of a financial

which presented a biographical, literary, or historical interest, was in comparative disorder; it could be seen that the classification had been left to the cashier Gudin, a zealous man of business, who assigned the first rank to practical matters. Accordingly, after having disinterred from this chaos the manuscripts of the three dramas and the opera of Beaumarchais, we looked in vain for the manuscripts of the "Barber of Seville" and "Marriage of Figaro," until having caused a locksmith to open a chest, the key of which had been lost, we discovered the two manuscripts at the bottom, beneath a mass of useless papers.* At the side were the works of a watch, executed on a large

operation, and loan in the form of a state lottery. Project of an office of exchange and of a bank of accumulation. Project of a bridge to the arsenal, (this last project, now realized, was one which much occupied the old age of Beaumarchais.)

* These two manuscripts are copies, but full of corrections, additions, and alterations, which are all in the handwriting of Beaumarchais. They appear to have been used at the first representation of each of the two pieces. The alterations are very numerous, above all in the "Barber of Seville," the two last acts of which, the fourth and the fifth, were cut down into one, between the first and second representations. In the manuscript I find the two acts as they were originally planned by the author. Various other sketches relating to these two above-mentioned pieces — the sketches of "Eugénie," the "Two Friends," the "Guilty Mother," and the "Memorials against Goëzman," (many parts of which have been re-written, as many as three times, in Beaumarchais' own handwriting,) allow us to put an end to that ridiculous question, which has been again raised during our own period, namely, whether Beaumarchais was really the author of his own works.

scale in copper, and bearing the following inscription: "*Caron filius ætatis* 21 *annorum regulatorem invenit et fecit,* 1753." It was the invention with which Beaumarchais, the young watchmaker, made his *début* in life. The juxtaposition in the same box of these objects, of such very different kinds, the masterpiece of the watchmaker, and the two masterpieces of the dramatic author, had something remarkable in it; it seemed to be a reminiscence of the Eastern monarch, who placed in the same box his shepherd's garment and his royal cloak. At the bottom of this box were also some portraits of women. One of these—a very small miniature representing a beautiful woman of from twenty to twenty-five years of age—was wrapped up in a piece of paper, bearing the following words in a delicate but rather scratchy handwriting: "*I return you my portrait*"—graceful but fragile relics; less graceful, however, than ourselves since they survive us! What has become of this beautiful person of ninety years since? (I say ninety years, because I recognized the writing, which dates from 1764). What has become of this beautiful person, who by way of sealing a reconciliation no doubt had written, "I return you my portrait." She has gone, as the poet Villon would say, "where last year's snow has gone!"*

* The ballad of the "*Dames du temps jadis.*"

"Dictes-moi ou, ne en quel pays
Est Flora la belle Romaine,

Among the numerous documents which this cabinet contained, many appeared to have been put in order by Beaumarchais himself, with the intention of making use of them for the memoirs of his life; and it could be seen at the same time that after forming this project he had abandoned it. Thus in a voluminous portfolio containing his correspondence with M. de Sartines, and the details of his travels as secret agent of Louis XV. and Louis XVI., the following lines in his own handwriting are to be seen: "*Original documents remitted by M. de Sartines, materials for the memoirs of my life;*" lower down in the same handwriting are the words, "*useless now.*"

The explanation of this is, that Beaumarchais, in his old age, during the first republic, leaving his daughter with his embarrassed affairs and his lawsuits against the existing government, considered he might injure her, and even injure his own reputation, if he called attention to his monarchical antecedents, and above all, to that part of his career during which he was in the direct service of Louis XV., Louis XVI., and their ministers.

However this may have been, the examination of

> Archipiada ne Thaïs,
> Qui fut sa cousine germaine?
> Echo parlant quand bruyt on maine
> Dessus rivière ou sus estan.
> Qui beaulté eut trop plus qu'humaine?
> Mais où sont les neiges d'antan."

those papers makes us regret exceedingly that Beaumarchais did not carry out his project of relating himself the singular phases of an existence which was mixed up with all the events of his period. Of all the famous men of the eighteenth century, he is probably the one about whom the greatest number of fabulous statements have been circulated, while the real incidents of his life have only been made known to the public by a few vague pages which he has inserted here and there in judicial pleadings, in which the apologetic form and the discussions which necessarily occur, put the reader on his guard, and satisfy his curiosity in a very incomplete manner.

Everything which has been written during the last fifty years about the author of the "Marriage of Figaro," has been taken from the same source, that is to say, borrowed from the essay published by La Harpe in 1800, and which forms part of his "Course of Literature."* The chapter devoted in this work to Beaumarchais is sufficiently developed. La Harpe, perceiving with reason that in Beaumarchais the man is superior to the writer, gives a little more scope to the biographical part of his subject than he is in the

* I must except an interesting article published recently by M. Sainte Beuve. The brilliant author of the "Causeries du Lundi," knowing that I had Beaumarchais' papers in my possession, did me the honour to apply to me for information regarding him, and I communicated to him a certain number of details of which he has made excellent use.

habit of doing with other authors; but whether, so soon after his death, Beaumarchais' papers had not yet been arranged, or whether La Harpe did not think it right to penetrate too far into an existence which was bound up with those of a multitude of persons who were alive when he was writing, it is certain that he has confined himself to such general information as he might have gathered from the widow of the defunct; and that, in a biographical point of view, his chapter is the merest sketch, in which there is not a date, not a detail, put down with exactness, and in which the principal parts are scarcely indicated; to say nothing of some rather grave errors which have been religiously reproduced by all subsequent biographers. It is not the less incontestable that this chapter of La Harpe's "Course of Literature" has been of much benefit to the reputation of Beaumarchais, which had been so vigorously attacked. Although a severe and occasionally too harsh a critic of the dramatic author, La Harpe renders to the qualities of the man with whom he was acquainted, a justice which cannot be suspected of partiality; for the celebrated aristarch had at this time become very hostile, not only to the writings, but also to the writers of the eighteenth century; and the unexpected exception which he makes in favour of Beaumarchais, the praises which he lavishes upon his disposition, the warmth with which, before any one else had done so,

he refutes the mass of calumnies which had been heaped upon the head of a man whose life was a continued struggle, have contributed not a little to prevent all conscientious writers who came after him from estimating the author of the "Marriage of Figaro," by the dialectics and sometimes atrocious imputations of his numerous adversaries.

The following is an extract from an unpublished letter of La Harpe addressed to Madame de Beaumarchais six months after the death of her husband, December 1, 1799, just when the critic was engaged upon his essay. This letter proves the spontaneity and sincerity of La Harpe's sympathy, which astonished some persons when the eleventh volume of the "Course of Literature" appeared.

"December 1.

"My own opinion," writes La Harpe, "of the excellent husband whom you regret, had long since made me foresee what is now suggested to you with regard to him by your very natural and praiseworthy affection. I have always been indignant at the calumnies and persecutions, equally odious and absurd, of which he has so often been the object. You may be certain, madam, that on this point, thorough justice shall be done—and this is indeed one of the reasons which have led me to think of placing a notice of him in the chapter on the 'Comedy of this Century,' but although this chapter has long been in the hands of the printer, the notice is not yet written. First of all, it will be necessary, according to my method, to read again everything he has written; and, as I spend so much time in writing, I have not much left for reading. The article must be done very carefully, moreover.

I have others to finish previously, and I shall perhaps have the pleasure of seeing you before I commence it: it will be the better for it in every respect.

"You must be equally at rest, madam, as regards everything which concerns his talent. I have always had a high opinion of it, and I like to render justice. I would doubtless rather have rendered it to him during his lifetime, and I esteemed him sufficiently to have enabled me, while I did so, to add a few words of disinterested criticism; the article would then only have found its place in the rapid glance at contemporary literature, which will conclude my work. His literary powers, however, belong to posterity; and, although it is not at present very far removed from him, I shall endeavour to give utterance to its voice as if a considerable distance already existed between them. My opinion will not be open to suspicion. I was more one of his acquaintances than one of his friends, and I never received from him any of those services which he rendered so willingly to men of letters, and of which I am not ignorant.

"Believe me, &c.,

"DELAHARPE.*"

The Essay of La Harpe is important then, as an honest testimony in favour of the good qualities of Beaumarchais; but as a biography it gives a very insufficient idea of the vicissitudes of his existence, and of the relation which it bore to the history of his time. An estimable writer, the brother of Gudin, the cashier of whom I lately spoke, Gudin de la

* While in other places we adopt for the name of La Harpe the orthography in most general use, we think we ought to mention that in a great number of his letters which we possess he always signs his name "Delaharpe."

Brenellerie, who was during thirty years one of the most attached and intimate friends of Beaumarchais, had been struck by the omissions in this Essay of La Harpe's, and had resolved to supply them.* With

* As Paul Philippe Gudin de la Brenellerie will have to appear more than once in this work, as Beaumarchais' *fidus Achates*, he deserves to be made the subject of a special notice. Sprung from a Genevese family, he was born in Paris in 1738. Like the author of the "Marriage of Figaro," he was the son of a watchmaker. His intimacy with him commenced in 1770, and continued without a cloud until the death of Beaumarchais. Gudin survived his friend thirteen years; he died, correspondent of the "Institute," February 26th, 1812. This writer, who is frequently praised by Voltaire, had more fertility than talent: he published a large number of works in prose and verse, and had several tragedies acted or printed, one of which was burnt at Rome, in 1768, by order of the Inquisition. All those productions are now equally forgotten. Few persons even have any idea that one of the lines most frequently quoted about Henri IV. "*Seul roi de qui le pauvre ait gardé la mémoire*" (the only king whose memory the poor man has preserved) is Gudin's. This line, which is to be found in a piece of poetry sent by him to a meeting of the Academy in 1779, was selected by that body as an appropriate inscription for the statue of Henry IV. (vide "Grimm's Correspondence," May 1799.) Write numerous volumes, then, in order that out of all your works one fortunate line alone may remain which every one knows, while no one knows who is its author! In the absence of genius, Gudin had at least an excellent heart. It is true that he partook of all the philosophical prejudices of the eighteenth century; he was also tinged with that licentiousness of wit which was then in fashion; but his life was an unpretending one, and much more regular than one would imagine from reading some of his lighter poetry. His intellect had, moreover, been principally directed to serious studies. The greatest part of his existence was devoted to the composition of a history of France in thirty-five volumes, on which he founded his greatest hopes of glory, and for which he was unable to find a pub-

this view he had prepared a detailed notice of his friend's life. This notice forms a manuscript of 419 pages, divided into four parts, and entitled, "The History of Pierre Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais; Materials for a literary, commercial, and political History of his Age." It was to be placed at the beginning of the edition of the works of Beau-

lisher. Gudin was timid by disposition, and eminently just and honourable. The disinterestedness of his affection and enthusiasm for Beaumarchais has sometimes been suspected, but without reason. I have a number of Gudin's letters which prove the freedom, openness, and dignity of his relations with his opulent friend. I will only cite one instance which appears to me very touching. When, after the Reign of Terror, Beaumarchais returned to France, Gudin, who had retired into the country to a distance of fifty leagues from Paris, was burning to embrace the man whom he loved more than any one in the world. But although he possessed a small patrimony, the severity of the times having deprived him of his ordinary income, he found himself without money to undertake the voyage. Beaumarchais, although impoverished himself, hastened to send him the money necessary. Gudin started, and, after gratifying the wish of his heart, returned to the country. A month afterwards I find that he sent Beaumarchais back the money he had borrowed. Beaumarchais hesitated about accepting it, but Gudin insisted with the air of a man who is not accustomed to allow any such advantage to be taken of him. What is to be said after this of the ingenious idea of a writer of the present day, who, as I am informed, has discovered that Beaumarchais profited by the poverty of Gudin to make him write those works, which are published under the name of the former? Independently of numerous other impossibilities which are involved by such a supposition, it is at once destroyed by reading Gudin, whose prose resembles that of Beaumarchais about as much as an ox resembles a spirited horse.

marchais, published by the same Gudin in 1809;* but after reading it, the widow of the author of the "Marriage of Figaro," a lady of distinction in every respect, and who will be spoken of more at length in the course of this work, appears to have objected to the publication of this biography, from motives which I find indicated in a note in her own handwriting. Madame de Beaumarchais remarks with much sense that, instead of contenting himself with relating the life of his friend, Gudin, the old philosopher of the eighteenth century, who has learnt nothing and forgotten nothing, mixes with his narrative a host of anti-religious declamations of his own, which have lost all their force in 1809; that he thus renders himself liable, without wishing it, not only to compromise the memory of Beaumarchais, but also to disturb the peace of mind of his family, whom "the critics," adds his widow, "would perhaps wish to make responsible for the opinions of the *philosophical sect, a sect which is so much cried down in the present day.*" Gudin, who was a good man, putting his philosophy out of

* This edition, published in seven volumes by Gudin in 1809, has been the model of all the subsequent editions of Beaumarchais. It is far from being complete. Not only has Gudin omitted several literary productions of Beaumarchais with which he was perhaps unacquainted, but he has even suppressed some very interesting historical documents from political reasons; and, from the same motives, he has only published a very small number—and those not always the most interesting—of the mass of letters which Beaumarchais left.

the question, and who was devoted to Madame de Beaumarchais, sacrificed his work to these considerations. He contented himself with extracting from it a chapter on the drama and comedies of his friend, which he placed at the end of the seventh volume of the edition of 1809, and his "History of Beaumarchais" met with the fate of his "History of France:" it remained in manuscript. This manuscript is not always very exact, above all as regards the first part of the life of Beaumarchais, with which Gudin was not acquainted from his own personal experience, and for which he does not seem to have consulted the materials which I have under my eyes. It contains also many idle dissertations quite away from the subject, with continual and most exaggerated laudations, which somewhat remind us of the bear and the paving stone. At the same time, several curious facts, hitherto unknown, are to be found in it, which will be useful for the work I have undertaken.

Such are the circumstances which determined me to give an attentive study to the unpublished documents which had been entrusted to me, and to give to the result of this study more space than would be necessary in the case of a simple biography. It appeared to me that this was a favourable occasion for endeavouring to paint Beaumarchais and his times, and that in this instance the history of an individual

might throw some light upon the history of an entire epoch; for the man of whom we are speaking sprung from the lower ranks of society, went in a certain manner through every social position. The astonishing variety of his qualifications brought him into contact with the most different kinds of persons and things, and urged him to play, turn by turn and sometimes simultaneously, the most different parts. Watchmaker, musician, song-writer, dramatist, comic writer, man of fashion, courtier, man of business, financier, manufacturer, publisher, shipowner, contractor, secret agent, negociator, pamphleteer, orator on certain occasions, a peaceful man by taste and yet always at law, engaging like Figaro in every occupation, Beaumarchais was concerned in most of the events, great or small, which preceded the Revolution.

Almost at the same moment we see him after being condemned to civic degradation by the Maupeou Parliament, bring about the overthrow of his judges, produce the "Barber of Seville," correspond secretly from London with Louis XVI., and though not yet recovered from the effect of the judicial sentence which still presses upon him, his credit exhausted, his goods seized, we see him obtain from the king himself a million francs, with which he originates and fosters the intervention of France in the quarrel between England and her American colonies. A short time afterwards, still composing songs, co-

medies, and operas, and always having two or three lawsuits on hand, Beaumarchais trades in the four quarters of the globe; he has forty vessels of his own on the sea; his navy fights side by side with that of the state at the battle of Grenada, his officers are decorated, he discusses the expenses of the war with the king, and treats with the United States, as one power would do with another.

Powerful enough to do all this, powerful enough to get "Figaro" produced on the stage in spite of Louis XVI., and to get the first general edition of Voltaire printed in spite of the clergy and the magistracy, Beaumarchais was not even able to insure respect for his own person and to save himself in the midst of all his splendour, at the age of fifty-three, from being arrested one fine morning, without rhyme or reason, and shut up for several days in a house of correction like some young scapegrace. Yet at the same time he appeared as the patron of men of letters, whose interests he advocated with the ministers, was in continual communication, as financier, and even as special agent and councillor, with MM. de Sartines, de Maurepas, de Vergennes, de Necker, and de Calonne; was courted by the nobles, who borrowed money from him and frequently forgot to return it, interceded on behalf even of princes* with the Arch-

* The Prince of Nassau Siegen, a very romantic person, who will be spoken of further on. He had married a Polish lady, who had

bishop of Paris, and was contributing powerfully, but involuntarily, as will be seen, to the destruction of the monarchy.

Persecuted under the Republic as an aristocrat, after having been imprisoned for his opposition under the royalty, the ex-agent of Louis XVI. became all the same, and in spite of himself, the agent and commissary of the Committee of Public Safety. His appointment as commissary, instead of placing him beyond peril, endangered his life and gave the last blow to his fortune. Originally poor, after having made his fortune and lost it again two or three times, he now saw all his property seized upon, and after having possessed an income of 150,000 francs, Beaumarchais, in his old age proscribed, concealed under a false name in a garret at Hamburgh, was reduced for a time to such a degree of want that he was obliged, as he says, to economise his matches so as to be able to use each of them twice.*

On his return to his native land, at the age of

been divorced, and who applied to the Archbishop of Paris, through the intercession of Beaumarchais, to have her marriage legitimized.

* The following is what I read on some detached leaves written by Beaumarchais at Hamburgh in 1794: "In my distress I have become so economical as to put out a match and keep it so that I may use it a second time. I only perceived that I did so upon reflection, being driven to it by the wretchedness of my position. This is only worth remarking from the fact that from an income of 150,000 francs I have suddenly fallen into utter want."

fifty-five, in ill health, deaf, but still indefatigable, Beaumarchais, while with more than the energy of youth he was mixing himself up with all the affairs of the day, at the same time superintended the production of his last drama, the "Guilty Mother," collected courageously the remains of his fortune, and recommenced, with one foot in the grave, all the labours of his life; defended himself against a legion of creditors, prosecuted a legion of debtors, and died, with lawsuits pending both against the French Republic and the Republic of the United States.

This sketch of a most varied life, which I propose to relate in detail, will be sufficient, I think, to cause the many-sided interest which is attached to it to be appreciated. It is not only because it is romantic and full of vicissitudes—it is also, and above all, because it is full of contrasts and incoherence that the life of Beaumarchais is worth being examined carefully as the expression and reflection of an entire period. Is not his life, difform and heterogeneous as it was, the most faithful picture of a social system, which becomes dissolved and decomposed by the continually-increasing discord between ideas and institutions, manners, and laws?

Beaumarchais' personal character has been much cried down; different causes—some of which are connected with circumstances, others with the man himself—have conspired to get him numerous ene-

mies. In this work the object will be, not to poetise his nature, but to show it as it was, and under all aspects. If it will gain in being presented thus in all its truth to those who, judging the man by the statements of his adversaries, had only looked upon him as a daring and clever intriguer, it will lose, perhaps, in the opinion of those who, in order to save themselves the trouble of studying details and shades of character, take men in the mass, and think they have explained the author of the "Marriage of Figaro" when they have said, "He was, in his own way, a great revolutionist." It will be seen in what sense and to what extent Beaumarchais was a revolutionist; it will be seen that he was soon left behind by the revolution, and that he was often as ardent in his resistance to the excesses of the new *régime*, as he had been in his attacks upon the abuses of the old.

If there still remains much to be said about the life and character of Beaumarchais, his talent has already been the subject of numerous criticisms.*

* It will be sufficient to quote here, independently of La Harpe's notice, and of the recent notice by M. Sainte Beuve, above alluded to, the very hostile, and often very unjust articles of the celebrated critic of the empire, Geoffroy, which are to be found in the collection of his *feuilletons* published under the title of "Course of Dramatic Literature," the more sensible and elegant articles by M. de Feletz, the pages full of life and brilliancy, which form part of M. Villemain's "Course of French Literature in the Eighteenth Century," but which only relate to Beaumarchais' "Memorials against Goëzman;" and

It is, however, still possible to go rather further than has yet been done into the literary questions which the mention of his name at once raises, both as regards serious drama and comedy. To the severe criticisms of La Harpe and the still more severe criticisms of Geoffroy, Beaumarchais opposes the best possible argument—that of success; not the success of a day, which proves nothing, but living and durable success, which resists changes in taste and fashion, the caprices of opinion, and those very revolutions which seemed to have produced it, and from which it appeared inseparable. Whatever may be thought of the nature of his talent and of its defects, the author of the "Marriage of Figaro" belongs to the very small number of writers of the eighteenth century who are still acted and still read. There is accordingly a reason for studying with care the types he created, the innovations he introduced on the stage and elsewhere, the very forms of his style—in a word, all the elements of which his literary physiognomy is composed.

finally, an ingenious and animated sketch by M. Saint-Marc Guardin, published in his "Literary and Moral Essays."

CHAPTER I.

BIRTH OF BEAUMARCHAIS.—HIS FAMILY.—THE HOME OF A SMALL BOURGEOIS IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY.—JULIE BEAUMARCHAIS AS THE DYING SWAN.—TONTON ON PROVINCIAL LIFE.—JANOT AND JANETTE.

Pierre Augustin Caron, who at twenty-five years of age assumed the name of Beaumarchais, was born on the 24th of January, 1732, in a watchmaker's shop in the Rue St. Denis, almost opposite the Rue de la Féronnerie, and close to that house in the market, where it was for a long time thought Molière was born. The error is at present known; but if this St. Denis quarter, which is not looked upon as the centre of brilliancy, and which enjoys in Paris about the same reputation that Bœotia had in Greece, must resign the honour of having given birth to Molière, it can console itself for it to a certain extent, since it has the right of claim as its natives, not only Regnard, our first comic poet after Molière, not only the author of the "Marriage of Figaro," but also M. Scribe, who was also born in the heart of the Rue St. Denis, in a mercer's shop, and of Béranger, who came into the world not far off at a tailor's in the Rue Montorgueil.

When it is known that Beaumarchais, at the

age of twenty-four, was still engaged in the paternal occupation; that he passed, almost without a transition, from his life as a watchmaker to his life at court—to a sort of intimacy with princes and princesses of the blood-royal; and that in this position, with all its novelty, he was able to make sufficient figure to gain some friends and a great many enemies — when this is considered, it appears desirable to inquire what influences he had received from family and education, which up to a certain point might have prepared him for his unexpected part.

His family was humble enough; and it is not without a certain feeling of astonishment that we enter their home, and find their habits, manners, and mental cultivation so far superior to what might have been expected in the household of a small tradesman. The progress of the middle classes during the eighteenth century never struck me more forcibly than when looking over the obscure archives of the family of a small watchmaker in the Rue St. Denis. The reader will be enabled to judge soon whether, in a sphere of life exactly similar, the level of intellectual and social cultivation has not been lowered rather than raised. The inferiority of cultivation in the shopkeeping class of the present day, which is quite reconcileable with the general progress of the masses, might be explained, perhaps above all in Paris, by this consideration, that in the eighteenth century the exist-

ence of a highly-refined aristocracy about the court, which associated more and more every day with the trading classes, without, however, mixing itself up with them, kept up a sort of emulation among them in manners and dress, which at the present time has entirely disappeared. I find this idea confirmed by Beaumarchais himself, in an unpublished letter which he wrote to his father from Madrid, in 1765 :—"The *bourgeoises* of Madrid," he writes, "are the most stupid creatures in the universe; very different from what they are in our country, where refinement in manners and conversation are now found in all classes."

An instance of this universal inclination in the eighteenth century for refinement in manners and conversation, is indeed found in his own family. Let us first of all make acquaintance with the father.

André Charles Caron came from the ancient province of Brie. He was born April 26th, 1698, near Meaux, at Lizy-sur-Ourcq, a little village, which has now become a little town, in the department of Seine and Marne. He was the son of Daniel Caron, a watchmaker at Lizy, and of Marie Fortain, both of them Calvinist Protestants. His family was numerous and poor, to judge from the family papers. It is well known that after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, in 1685, Protestants had no legal existence in France. Independently of the persecutions

directed against those who performed any of their religious ceremonies, their marriages and their children were considered illegitimate. One of the Protestant churches which resisted this system of oppression the most strenuously, was the reformed church of Brie. It yielded neither to the eloquence of Bossuet nor to the *dragonnades*,* and the Protestants continued to have their unions blessed *in the desert* —that is to say, in a secluded retreat at the back of a wood—by some wandering and fugitive pastor. Thus, without doubt, were the grandfather and grandmother of Beaumarchais married at Lizy, in 1694; and it was perhaps by the hand of one of these fugitive pastors that the names of the children of Daniel Caron and Marie Fortain were written on a little book, which I have now under my eyes, and which is like a book for housekeeping accounts. These humble archives of a Protestant family commence with this pious inscription:—"May our help and beginning be in God, who has made all things. Amen. 1695." Then follows the list of fourteen children, several of whom died at a tender age, and of whom André Charles Caron is the fourth.

Beaumarchais, in a petition to the king, represents himself as nephew, on the father's side, of an uncle who died a captain of grenadiers, with the cross of St.

* See the "History of the Churches of the Desert among the Protestants of France," by Charles Coquerel, vol. ii. p. 513.

Louis; as cousin, on the same side, of one of the directors of the India Company, and of a king's secretary—which would seem to indicate that his father's family was related to some families in a much higher position than his own. It is certain, however, that his father was born in a poor and humble station. While still very young, André Charles Caron enlisted in the Rochepierre regiment of dragoons, under the name of Caron d'Ailly. After a period of service which must have been rather short, he obtained, for some cause or other, his final discharge on the 5th of February, 1721. He then came to Paris to study the art of watchmaking, and a month after his arrival abjured Calvinism, as appears from a certificate, signed by the Cardinal de Noailles, which I have before me, and which is preceded by a declaration in the following words:—

"On the 7th of March, 1721, I pronounced my abjuration of the heresy of Calvin at Paris, in the church of the new Catholics.

"Signed, ANDRE CHARLES CARON."

Beaumarchais then was born a Catholic of a father who, from Protestantism had returned to the bosom of Catholicism; his recollection of the religion of his ancestors probably added its influence to his natural instinct for opposition, and will at all events assist us in explaining the zeal which he will be

seen to display about all questions which interest the Protestants.

A year after his abjuration, André Charles Caron addressed a petition to the king in council, in order to be received as a master watchmaker, although he had not yet served the necessary term of apprenticeship. In this petition the petitioner called attention to his abjuration, in support of his prayer; which seems to indicate that at this period it was necessary to be a Catholic in order to exercise the profession of watchmaker.* Some doubts might be suggested by this, as to the disinterestedness of the father's conversion; but these doubts disappear on reading his private letters, in which he appears to us practising all the duties of his new religion with zeal, animated with a sincere fervour, and at the same time making use of certain austere forms of speech which he probably retained from his former creed.

Four months after being received a master watchmaker, on the 13th of July 1722, André Charles Caron married Marie Louise Pichon, whose father is spoken of in the act of marriage as a "citizen of Paris." She was an excellent person, but of rather ordinary intellect, to judge of her by some of our documents. As for Charles Caron, his correspondence

* It appears, indeed, from the Appendix of M. Coquerel's work, that the certificate of Catholicism was at last made necessary for admission into all the corporations of workmen.

exhibits him in the light of a man who is very superior to his position. Indeed watchmaking, from its connexion with the exact sciences, is the first of the mechanical arts; but Caron had given himself a scientific education far beyond that usually possessed by a watchmaker; accordingly, in 1746 he was sufficiently celebrated for his knowledge of mechanics to be consulted by the Governor of Madrid, on the employment of certain machines for dragging harbours and rivers, and he explains himself upon the subject with all the precision and authority of a highly competent person. In spite, perhaps even on account, of his talents, Beaumarchais' father could never succeed in making his fortune. He met with losses in his business as a watchmaker and jeweller, and finally, during the last years of his life, had only a life pension to subsist upon, which was allowed him by his son.

The literary acquirements of Beaumarchais' father were no less remarkable for his station than his scientific attainments; above all, when it is considered that after leaving a little village, to become first a dragoon and afterwards a watchmaker, he owed everything he knew to himself. His style is in general good, sometimes elegant, with that tinge of fervent piety of which I was just now speaking, which was curious enough at that epoch, and which is never found in Beaumarchais himself.

Here, for instance, is a letter which he writes to his

son, and in which the reader will perceive—probably with some surprise—that the future author of the "Marriage of Figaro" is compared by his father to Sir Charles Grandisson. This letter bears the date of a period when Beaumarchais had as yet no literary reputation; but he had already made his fortune, and was behaving, as he always did, like an excellent son.

"Paris, 18th December, 1764.

"You desire me in your modest manner to love you a little. It is not possible for me to do so, my dear son: a son like yourself is not made to be loved only a little by a father who thinks and feels as I do. The tears of affection which fall from my eyes upon this paper are a proof of it; for the qualities of your excellent heart, the strength and greatness of your mind, fill me with the most tender love. Honour of my grey hairs, my son, my dear son, how have I merited from God the favours he lavishes upon me through you? In my opinion, the greatest favour he can grant to a kind and loving father is a son like yourself. My acute pains left me yesterday, otherwise I should not have been able to write to you. I was five days and four nights without eating or sleeping, and without ceasing to cry out. During the intervals of my suffering I read Grandisson, and in how many points did I not find a just and noble resemblance between Grandisson and my own son! Father of your sisters, friend and benefactor of your father, if England, I said to myself, has her Grandisson, France has her Beaumarchais, with this difference, that the English Grandisson is only the fiction of an amiable writer, while the French Beaumarchais really exists for the consolation of my days. If a son honours himself in praising a worthy father, why should I not be permitted to boast of my dear son, while, at the same time, I am only doing him justice?

"Farewell, my dear child. I wound your modesty; so much the better: you only appear more amiable to the eyes and heart of your affectionate father and friend,

"CARON."

Another letter, anterior by two years to the one I have just quoted, also shows the fine intelligence and elevated sentiments of the watchmaker Caron in a happy light. Beaumarchais had just bought a house in the Rue de Condé, where he proposed to assemble the whole of his family. The father was just giving up business, after suffering considerable losses by it, for which his son had advanced him more than 50,000 francs. He had just recovered from a long and painful illness, which had somewhat embittered his disposition, and which caused some fear to be entertained as to the possibility of living in common. It is under these circumstances that he writes to Beaumarchais, under the date of February 5th, 1763:—

"I ought to try," he says, "to tranquillise so kind and respectful a son, by assuring him that he has only to expect gentleness, amenity, and the most tender affection from his father; I would even say the most lively gratitude, if I did not fear to wound his delicacy. It is true that the illness from which I am recovering by degrees was so severe, so long, and so little merited, that it is no wonder if my disposition has rather suffered by it. I have had fits of ill-temper, well or ill-founded, and even attacks of despair, from which my principles were scarcely able to preserve me; but, my dear child, would this be a reason for conjecturing that in the enjoyment of a life as calm as that which your filial love

is preparing for me, I should wish to disturb the tranquillity and calmness of yours, which I have so much reason to value? A heart which is not naturally bad must have some cause for becoming so; and where could it be found, unless I were mad, among my children, who are all my joy? What father will be happier than yours? I bless Heaven with deep gratitude for finding in my old age a son with so excellent a disposition; and so far from feeling lowered by my present situation, my soul rises and warms at the touching idea of owing my happiness, after God, to him alone. Your conduct often reminds me of those beautiful verses which the father of the 'married philosopher' says to his brother in speaking of his worthy son."*

The last letter of old M. Caron to his son, which he wrote at the age of seventy, with a tremulous hand, and only a few days before his death, is full of the same elevated sentiments, and at the same time, reflects the greatest credit upon Beaumarchais:—

"August 25th, 1775.

"My dear Son," writes the old man, on the point of death, "My dear son, that name is precious to my heart. I profit by an interval between my attacks of excessive pain, or rather torment, which throw me into convulsions, only to thank you affectionately for what you sent me yesterday. It is not possible for me to go into any details about the subject you wished me to speak of. If you return to England† I beg

* These lines, from the "Philosophe Marié," by Des touches, which old M. Caron refers to, without quoting them, are in the third Act, Scene xiii., and are spoken by Lisimon in reference to his son,—

"Je suis plus glorieux de vivre à ses dépens
Que s'il vivait aux miens, oui ma vive tendresse,
Se complait à le voir l'appui de ma vieillesse."

† This was after the action against Goëzman; Beaumarchais had

you to bring me back a bottle of the salts which are given people to smell when like me they are subject to fainting fits. Alas! my dear child, perhaps, I shall no longer have any need of them when you come back. I pray the Lord every day of my life to bless you, to reward you, and to preserve you from all harm; these will always be the prayers of your dear friend, and affectionate father,

"CARON."

"If it be possible, leave your address in London with Miron,* so that in case of accident I may be able to send you my last blessing."

The portrait of Beaumarchais' father would not be complete if I did not now endeavour to give some idea of those other shades of his character, in which he bears some resemblance to the author of the "Barber of Seville." We have already observed his dignity, sensitiveness, and a slight touch of religious fervour; he had also other characteristics. He had certain worldly qualities, such as a taste for literature, art, and society, such as a keen perception, a jovial disposition, and a certain ingenuous roguery, which was transmitted from father to son with more vivacity and much less ingenuousness. Accordingly old M. Caron is quite familiar with all that appears in the way of literature; himself, his son, his daughters—every member of his family—write verses, good or bad.

gone to England upon a mission from Louis XV., which will be spoken of further on.

* One of Beaumarchais' brothers-in-law.

Music is also cultivated among them to a great extent. We shall even see, further on, that he is obliged to repress this universal melomania: his son, from early childhood, had shown talent for all kinds of instruments; his daughters were also excellent musicians, and, moreover, acted very agreeably.

"I do not know, my dear son," he writes to Beaumarchais at Madrid, in a letter dated January 8, 1765, "whether you will find that this pamphlet is worth the postage; but I send it you in order to amuse you; it is the *best* and most *cutting* thing which has been brought out against Poinsinet, whose little piece, "Le Cercle," at the Français, has had a prodigious success, and has brought him at least a thousand crowns, reckoning what he has had from the theatre, together with what was given him by the bookseller, who bought the copyright; accordingly he is very proud, and remarkably brilliant in his costume."*

In this same letter a supper is spoken of, at which M. Caron is to be present with his daughters, with Préville, the actor of the Théâtre-Français, little Poinsinet, and a Madame Gruel, who is a little struck with Beaumarchais, whom the sly old man calls Madame Pantagruel, and "who," he says, "cannot love my son without loving all the family, and myself into the bargain, so capacious is her heart."

* "Le petit Poinsinet" was a dramatic author, more celebrated for his eccentricities, and the mystifications of which he was the object, than for his talent. His little piece, "Le Cercle," is, nevertheless, a witty production. One of Beaumarchais' sisters characterises it very well, when she says, "It is the prettiest little nothing, and the most agreeable which has been given for a long time."

The unpublished letters of Beaumarchais to his father are characterised by filial affection, and at the same time by the most profound respect. When he has become a frequenter of the court, and is at the height of his opulence and aristocratic position, he never writes to the old watchmaker without beginning his letters thus:—"*Monsieur and dearest father,*" while he always finishes them with, "*I have the honour to be, Monsieur and dearest father, with the most respectful attachment your very humble and very obedient servant and son.*" Sometimes, however, the respectful correspondent emancipates himself a little; and goes so far as to address *badinage* to his father; and it is then amusing enough to see the father take it up, and enter the lists with a man so practised in this kind of contest as his son. We will give one instance of this out of several.

Beaumarchais is at Madrid, occupied with a hundred things at a time—always mixing the grave with the gay, the lively with the severe—running after Clavigo, visiting the ministers, ambassadors, and theatres, studying politics and literature, organising various industrial enterprises, passing his evenings in drawing-rooms, playing the harp, composing, singing seguedillas, and paying court to the ladies.

At another time Beaumarchais not only occupies himself with getting his sisters married, but also takes it into his head to find a wife for his father,

who has become a widower. He wants him to marry a Madame Henry, who was herself the widow of a Consul des Marchands, rather advanced in years, but very amiable, to judge from her correspondence; she possessed some fortune, and had long been intimate with the Caron family.

"I am not astonished," he writes from Madrid to his father, "at your attachment to Madame Henry; she has a most cheerful disposition, and one of the best hearts I know. I wish you had been sufficiently happy to inspire her with a warmer return of your affection. She would make you happy, and you might certainly induce her to make the agreeable experiment of a union founded upon mutual affection and an esteem of twenty-five years. If I were you, I know how I should set about it, and if I were in her place, I also know how I should reply; but I am neither one nor the other, and it is not my business to unravel this knot of yours: I have enough to do with my own."

To this challenge the father replies, in a letter dated the 19th September, 1764.

"We supped yesterday with my dear amiable friend, who laughed heartily at what you say in your letter about the means you would adopt if you were in my place. Accordingly, she says she should be careful how she trusted you, and that, if she now embraces you with all her heart, it is only because you are at three hundred leagues distance from her."

However, with the assistance of his son the father succeeded in making the conquest of Madame Henry, who was then sixty years of age, and whom he married on the 15th of January 1766, being himself seventy-seven years of age. After being married two years he lost his second wife, and some months before

his death married again, but this time without the consent and even without the knowledge of his son. The person who became his wife was a cunning old maid, who paid him great attention, and got married to him in hopes of being able to extract money from Beaumarchais. Profiting by the weakness of the old man, she had made him assign to her in the marriage contract a dowry and a share in his property. Now old Caron had no property to leave. What he had received with his second wife had been used for repaying certain advances made by his son, independently of the regular income with which he supplied him. The accounts had been gone over, and Beaumarchais had been made safe; but his father's third wife—speculating on the celebrity of her son-in-law, and on his dislike to a lawsuit of so delicate a nature just after the Goëzman affair had been settled—threatened to dispute the accounts and to make the matter public. For the first time in his life Beaumarchais capitulated to an adversary, and by means of a sum of 6000 francs got rid of the person in question, who appears to have been very cunning, very bold, and rather witty, to judge from her letters. On the portfolio containing the papers relating to this affair, I read in the handwriting of Beaumarchais these words: "The infamous conduct of my father's widow forgiven." It is to the influence of this cunning old woman that I must attribute the only period of misunderstanding

between the father and the son, which I can discover in a correspondence which embraces the fifteen latter years of the father's life. I must add, that this misunderstanding only lasted for an instant, for the letter from the father on his deathbed (which we have quoted above) proves that the good feeling between his son and himself had been completely re-established at the period of his death, which took place at the end of August 1775.

In order to complete this family picture, we must now introduce Beaumarchais' sisters. He had five, three of whom were born before him. The eldest, Marie Josèphe Caron, who was married to an architect named Guilbert, established herself at Madrid with her husband and one of her sisters. They there opened a milliner's shop. The husband, who became architect to the King of Spain, went mad and died: his widow returned to France in 1772, without fortune and with two children. Beaumarchais made her an allowance until her death, and after her death continued it to her children, the last of whom died in 1785. Beaumarchais' second sister, Marie Louise Caron, who is called Lisette in the family correspondence, was Clavijo's betrothed, and the heroine of the romantic episode related in the Memoir against Goëzman, which Göthe made the subject of a drama.*

* I speak of Louise Caron immediately after her elder sister, on account of their having lived together in Spain; but, although I could

The documents left by Beaumarchais do not give us much information about Lisette. It appears that she possessed both wit and beauty. After the rupture with Clavijo, there was some idea of her marrying a friend of her brother's; but the marriage did not take place. She returned, I believe, to France with her elder sister, and retired with her into the convent of the Ladies of the Cross at Roye, in Picardy.*

Beaumarchais' third sister, Madeleine Françoise Caron, was married in 1756 to a celebrated watchmaker, named Lépine. From this marriage were born a son, who served as an officer in the American war, under the name of Des Epiniers, and who died

not find the sister's certificate of birth, I am inclined to think that Louise Caron was the third in point of age, and that she was a little older than Beaumarchais—a fact which would somewhat diminish the poetry of her adventure with Clavijo, and also his infamy, as the heroine of the drama, which was performed in 1764, would at the time have been at least thirty-three years of age.

* I suppose she died in this convent, but I am not sure of it. One of Beaumarchais' grandsons thinks he remembers having heard that she died in America, without, however, being able to give any details on the subject. It has been stated, with reference to a recent drama imitated from "Göthe's Clavijo," that Lisette at last got married. The documents before me disprove that statement. One thing which appears certain is, that she had ceased to exist in 1775, when Caron the father died; for in the judicial acts occasioned by his decease mention is made of all the members of the family, and Marie Louise Caron is not included among them. It still seems rather strange to me that the sister, whose name Beaumarchais has made most widely known, should be the very one of whom least can be ascertained from his papers.

without issue, and a daughter, who was married to another watchmaker, M. Raguet. M. Raguet added his father-in-law's name to his own, and had a son, M. Raguet-Lépine, who, under Louis Philippe's government, was a peer of France, and who recently died.

We can obtain fuller details respecting Beaumarchais' two other sisters. They lived longer with him, and the documents which we possess in connexion with them will assist us in depicting the homely but agreeable and cultivated family in the bosom of which the author of the "Marriage of Figaro" was brought up.

The most accomplished of the five daughters of the watchmaker Caron was the fourth, Marie Julie, and she is the one whose mental disposition, in spite of some shades of difference, most resembles that of her brother. Beaumarchais, in a note, represents Julie as only two years younger than himself. I see, from one of her letters, that she must have been born in 1735 or 1736, and consequently that she was three or four years younger than he was. She died a year before him, and was never married. Her whole life was devoted to the interests of her brother, whom she loved dearly, and by whom she was dearly loved. When the author of the "Marriage of Figaro" took the name of Beaumarchais, which he calls, himself, a *nom de guerre*, he gave it to his favourite sister. Ac-

cordingly, after her brother's celebrity, it was under the name of Julie Beaumarchais that Julie Caron made herself celebrated in society, where she shone as much by the keenness of her wit as by the amiability of her disposition.

Julie's beauty was not of a regular description; her nose was rather long, and she ridicules it herself very good-humouredly; but she had a pretty figure, a lively face, and charming eyes.

Without being so good a musician as her younger sister, Julie had a great talent for the harp: she even played the violoncello. She understood Italian and Spanish, and composed the verses and music of a number of songs, which she used to improvise on all possible occasions. Her verses are in general more remarkable for their liveliness than for their poetic value. There are, nevertheless, some compositions of hers in a serious style, which are not without merit. But it is, above all, in her familiar letters that Julie's wit is shown in all its grace and vivacity. We will choose from among these letters various fragments, which will show us Beaumarchais' sister at different ages. The first is from a letter which was written when she was very young:—

"You must know," she writes to a friend named Helène, "on what mad terms I am with your brother. The interest he appeared to take in me, of which I spoke to you a month since, has increased wonderfully since the departure of our

friends for the country. He used to come to sup with us every evening, after which he walked with us until twelve or one in the morning; in the meanwhile he used to pay his court to me, in a style which was somewhat that of a Goth it is true, but which was nevertheless amusing, while I replied in the same strain in my usual mad way. But in the midst of all these pleasantries, I sometimes found opportunities for introducing a few sly expressions, which must have convinced him that I did not really love him; and I think he is convinced of it, although I have never said so many soft things to him as at present, in accordance with an agreement we have made to love one another two days in the week; he chose Monday and Saturday, I took Thursday and Sunday. And those days indeed we say very affectionate things, although it is part of the agreement that one of us is always to be disagreeable when the other makes love."

With reference to this brother, Julie writes again to her friend:—

"My last letter showed you that your brother was in a most satisfactory condition. What else can I say to you? Can I offer you any intelligence that could be more acceptable. He is so plump that you might eat him up without salt, if you did not know, as I do, that a barrister is probably the toughest and most indigestible of all dishes."

As Julie Beaumarchais grows older, she acquires a greater freedom and originality of style. We will quote one of her letters, written *currente calamo*, to a friend younger than herself, who had affected a rapture of melancholy in which Julie did not believe, and which she ridicules with much animation, and frequently with much elegance and delicacy:—

"Oh, my dear, what lofty sentiments, what fantastic sorrow! what expressions! what a sublime soul yours must be! What contempt of life! What an admirable abnegation of all your faculties! You wish to quit everything in this world. No, no, never. My soul will not consent to it. Heavenly powers assist her! Make her abandon this idea—this most fatal of ideas. Let her still live, for friendship, for affection, for love, for everything which she can inspire so well, and in which she is so well made to sympathise. Rescue her soul from the annihilation into which she has already precipitated it. Let all nature appear to her re-animated and re-embellished. May her beauty, her grace, her attractions, never diminish, for they can never increase; may her lovers be faithful to her, and her friends constant, and let her not descend to the tomb. . . . . etc., *punctum cum virgulâ.* You see, my dear, what deep sentiment, what an energetic soul I possess; but even now I have only told you half what I feel. All my ideas are dark at this moment, but do not let them darken you. You have my profession of faith. I believe in your beauty, your wit, in all your charms, but not by any means in your fine sentiment. You love just as I love, somewhat superficially. We have as yet seen but the bark of the tree—the outer casings of our souls. Yours is fresh and smooth, mine is dry and shrivelled. There is no harm in that, but you make me laugh with your mournful elegies. I quite understand your lively, careless disposition, and yet you wish to draw tears from me. How giddy you must be! You do not, then, remember that you have told me everything? You have told me that tears injured one's appearance; that is exactly the reason why I no longer weep: and you had also better give up weeping. You are now in society. Send me news, anecdotes, gossip about the theatre, *bons mots.* I want to feel younger. I have a sluggish intellect, but an ardent imagination: to awaken one, and tranquillise the other, must be the object of your letters. Continue, then, your present

life, and abandon all thoughts of the grave. The grave, indeed! Pshaw! you appear to me as a skeleton when I wish to see you full of youth and beauty. I do not believe a word about your friend being in a dangerous state. She has caught cold, it is a mere trifle, of which you wish to make a great deal. If unfortunately it were true, I should be very much grieved by it, and I should pity your sorrows for the sake of your beauty. Heaven preserve you from misfortune, and from everything which could interfere with your charms. I have just returned from the sermon, and, wishing to be cheered and enlivened, preach you this homily. It is very badly written; it may be foolish; but I do not care about that, I wish to amuse myself. As for pleasing you, that was the last thing I thought of, and one which I considered to be of the least importance. If I have succeeded in both respects, so much the better for you, and I congratulate you upon it."

Other letters show that Julie was fond of acting, and that she acted so very successfully.

"By what right," she asks, in a letter to another friend, "do you call upon me to work you something for your fête, when you neglected to wish me many happy returns of my own? Is not my patroness saint the queen of saints, and is not a Julie of much more importance than a Sophie? I am amused at your threats. However, I have no time to attend to your remarks: I have other things to think of. We are getting up plays and making love. With such ideas there is of course no rest. On Tuesday we played 'Nanine' and 'Les Folies Amoureuses.' We had an audience of forty-five persons, and Julie gained general admiration in all her parts. Every one declared that she was one of the best actresses. I say this not for the sake of praising her, for you know how modest she is, but solely in order to gratify your weakness and to justify your predilection for her. On the day after the fête of St. Quasimodo, we give 'Tartuffe'

and 'La Servante Maitresse.' The chevalier takes the part of 'Tartuffe,' and I play 'Dorine' the attendant. We are, *moreover, getting up a fête in honour of Beaumarchais' return, which will be much more interesting.* I will tell you all *about it when I write.*"

Julie is very exacting on the subject of polite manners. Writing from a château in Touraine to one of her sisters, she says:—"On the whole, the *ton* of the house is not bad, but it has not the genuine stamp, there are points to object to in it.

Julie's wit has, however, its share of the defects which are found in that of her brother. It is not without a certain affectation, a certain attempt at subtlety, which is rather tortured, while from time time it is marred by a species of crude joviality. Like Beaumarchais, she errs chiefly in the matter of taste. On one occasion, in reproaching her younger sister with her idleness in not writing to her, Julie expresses herself as follows:—

"What a rich but miserly person you seem to be. With so much wit to offer, so much talent for expressing it, such happy fertility, you force me, who am as poor as Lazarus, to beg from you. I have to knock at the door of your heart, to watch outside your intellect, and to appeal to your imagination, your memory, and all your other servants. I really think you deserve perdition, for having so much wit and so little kindness."

In another place, by the side of a letter which is full of excellent advice to this same younger sister, who had just been married, I find another, in which Julie,

complaining of being separated from the bride, who had gone on a journey, apostrophises her brother-in-law in a light and rather free style of badinage, which reminds us of Beaumarchais. This smartness, however, does not prevent Julie from sometimes giving herself up to effusions of sentimental and romantic affection; at times she exhibits an enthusiasm worthy of Diderot, as when she expresses her admiration for Richardson. The reader may remember Caron comparing his son Beaumarchais to Sir Charles Grandisson; here is the same idea expressed by Julie in a little note-book, in which she was accustomed to jot down her thoughts.

"Richardson! divine man, with what love I peruse you! My soul rises with your ideas, and the moral you teach penetrates to the very bottom of my heart. I feel a better person by one half since reading 'Sir Charles Grandisson.'

"Grandisson. What a model! How the book pleases me! How it interests me! Is it on account of certain points of resemblance which I find in the work, the details of which are always reminding me of the brother whom I love so much? I cannot say; but if things affect us in proportion as they are closely connected with us, what book ought to have a greater impression upon me? As I compare events, and look at one point in connexion with another, my feelings become excited. I see in Beaumarchais a second Grandisson. The same genius, the same goodness, the same noble mind, equally elevated and kind. Never did an ill-natured thought towards his numerous enemies enter his mind. He is the friend of mankind. Grandisson is the glory of all that surround him, and Beaumarchais is their happiness.

"Virtuous Grandisson, model of your sex! dear, dear,

beloved brother, the admiration of both sexes, you will never behold these secret expressions of tenderness which form the charm of my life. I introduce them here for myself, for my own pleasure, for the sake of a multitude of feelings which I wish to analyse. I mean to write a journal of my thoughts, and begin it to-day."

The opinions of Julie on literature indicate, at the same time, a judicious intellect. Thus, in 1775, after having read a somewhat indifferent novel which was then in fashion, the "Paysan perverti," by Rétif de la Bretonne, she writes as follows:—

"I send you back, my dear little chatterbox, this 'Paysan,' so much vaunted, so much sought after, so degraded and mutilated, that he becomes quite an object of pity. There are, no doubt, excellent things in the work: but as the intended moral appears to be missed, owing to the unnaturalness of the characters and the inflation of the style, the only moral which we can draw from it, now that we have read it, is not to buy it. I am obliged to you, however, for lending it to me. I fed on it for some time, I even devoured it, and it has left me nevertheless unsatisfied. 'Such is the property of watery diet; it is neither succulent nor strengthening. I believe that your friendship for me is quite of another description."

Beaumarchais' sister seems to have possessed a certain power of analysis which was both psychologic and physiologic, to judge from the annexed sketch of the character of a lady which I found among her papers:—

"A mind far above the average, worked upon by a very lively imagination; a marvellous delicacy of organization, which is sometimes the cause of involuntary shocks to her

temper; a vague melancholy (like the sun among clouds); a mind perplexed with doubt; beautiful sentiments, without any object to fix them upon; excessive kindness; a heart which wastes its energy by devoting itself to too many things; a rare beauty, somewhat injured by manners in which more coquetry than nature can be perceived; a calm pride, founded upon her dignity of disposition; a great variety of tastes; more imagination than susceptibility—making her less likely to captivate by degrees than to interest at first sight; difficult to persuade either to remain single or to get married, on account of the freedom of the former and the ties of the latter state: with sufficient gaiety always to find amusement for herself, but at the same time inclined to serious thoughts by the natural loftiness of her mind; born for high objects and noble ideas, indifferent to the advantages which she possesses, elevating her soul at times to the dignity of that of a Roman matron—French lightness on the pedestal of Swiss dignity.* Owing to an unfortunate circumstance, she was led to look upon the world in the first instance on the dark side; her pride prevented her recalling the opinion she had pronounced upon it—she was perhaps incapable of altering this opinion, the weapon, as it were, having broken in the wound. Accordingly she never felt inclined to give up her heart to friendship, lest she should afterwards wish to recal it. There was something indefinable in the beauty of her mind, as in that of her countenance; so much delicacy in the features, that the lines of separation were imperceptible. She was made rather for the happiness of others than for her own, and feared to breathe the odour of the rose, lest she should come in contact with the thorn; observing everything with

* This last passage inclines me to think that this sketch of Julie's probably refers to Beaumarchais' third wife, whose family was of Swiss origin, and whose physiognomy, as indicated in his letters, has much resemblance with certain parts of the above portraits.

a semblance of indifference; exhibiting sometimes the least possible amount of ill will towards established principles, but at once recovering from it through her innate sense of propriety."

Finally, after experiencing some deception in love, although her letters frequently denote a liveliness of imagination rather than a disposition for sentiment, Julie devoted herself more and more to religious ideas. In the very year in which the "Marriage of Figaro" was produced, in 1784, Beaumarchais' sister, strangely enough, published a few copies of a little duodecimo volume, which was printed anonymously under the title of "Reflections on Life; or, Moral Considerations on the Value of Existence." It was a collection of thoughts borrowed from Young and many other authors, mixed up with reflections by Julie herself. At the end of the manuscript is found a collection of prayers and a paraphrase of the "Miserere," also composed by Beaumarchais' sister, but which, I believe, do not appear in the printed volume.* An extract from the notice at the commencement of Julie's book, will suffice to give an idea of the tone and object of the work.

* The "Biographie Universelle" of Michaud (new edition), in the article "Caron," (Julie) raises a doubt as to whether the work in question is by her, Beaumarchais' sister, or by a writer named Demandre. The volume is really by Julie. I have the entire manuscript in her handwriting, with the censor's permit upon it, and a letter from Letourneur addressed to Julie. Julie frequently speaks of her book in her letters, and even mentions it in her will.

"I loved," she said, "to read the beautiful poetry of Young. I admired his sublime work, but my mind became fatigued by his elevated and enthusiastic strains. I wish he had been more simple, and nearer my own level. I have, however, made certain extracts from him, which I have mixed with reflections taken from other authors.

"As my book was intended to remain in manuscript, I did not follow any particular rules in composing it; wherever I have found in my readings a lofty idea, a noble and touching thought, or even a point in morals which was worthy of attention, I have incorporated it in this work, which is intended only for myself, to console me and strengthen me through profound meditation.

"However, a friend, who is well known for her wit, her virtue, and her intelligence, and who has considerable influence over me, wished to print and circulate it. May it have on those who read it the same good effect which it has exercised on myself!"

What a strange pendent to the "Marriage of Figaro!" However, Julie did not lose her natural liveliness as she increased in piety. During the reign of terror, while Beaumarchais was living in exile at Hamburgh, while his wife and daughter, after suffering imprisonment, were forced to quit the magnificent house on the boulevard which marked them out for the fury of the mob, Julie, who had also been three months in prison, remained alone—entirely alone—in the vast and sumptuous mansion which had been already sequestered, and which was visited every day by legal functionaries in their *carmagnoles* and red caps. She supported all these dangers, all these annoyances,

not to speak of privations which must have been most painful for her in her old age, with much strength of mind and serenity.

"I feel my isolated position very much," she writes to her brother at Hamburgh, in 1795, "in this large house, where I have been entirely alone, after passing three months and a half in prison. My solitude is such, that at least twenty times I have thought of sending over to the Café Gibet* to ask for some honest man to come and converse with me. * * * * I think, with admiration," she adds, "of how much you are capable, when all ideas seem to be either mean, or altogether wanting with other men. Wonderful man! I bow before you and salute you; may you long preserve your precious gifts! Be moderate in your pleasures, and also in your diet. Never devote too much time to sleep, or you will dull your intellect; whereas your genius, if well taken care of, ought to shine during many lustres to come."

Further on, Julie Beaumarchais proves to us in a few words that she has retained her spirits as perfectly as her brother.

"Sixty years have passed over me," she writes, "and six years of revolution, with two of extraordinary suffering, have quite destroyed my beauty and my physical strength. With all this bodily decay, however, I have never felt a greater command of my judgment and reasoning powers. All that has taken place, or that is still taking place, gives me continued and important subjects for reflection, and keeps my mind in a state of great activity."

It is, indeed, in the letters of her old age that Julie's style acquires frequently its greatest energy

* A café which stood on the Place de la Bastille.

and liveliness. Thus, speaking of a man who was found dead in his house, she exclaims:

"Ah! poor humanity, how ugly do you appear at this moment! This mute but terrible apostrophè from the dust that is dead to the dust that liveth, which of us can understand it?"

Elsewhere, in order to express the admiration with which the moral strength of character of her sister-in-law, Madame de Beaumarchais inspires her, she says—

"Take good care of yourself, my dear friend; for women of your model are made no longer. You need all your courage to be able to bear up against the miseries of an age, of which, believe me, we shall soon see the end; but if I, frail and weakly sapling, have been able to withstand its violence, how will it be with thee, proud and majestic cedar, or rather sturdy stock, throwing out its thousand ramifications?"

In another letter, addressed to the same correspondent, I find the following pleasing passage:—

"I will no longer dwell upon my gratitude, since you refuse to dwell upon what you have done to make me grateful. We are like the peacocks of Juno: each endeavouring to shine before the other—to the greater advantage of both.

Again, a few lines from Julie to her niece, Beaumarchais' daughter, who was on the point of marriage, enable us to form an excellent estimate of the amiable qualities of our fair letter-writer's mind.

"Thus, in a very few days you are about to undertake the arduous character of a young lady who disposes of her future

fate and chooses her husband. May the Almighty fill your heart with emanations of his spirit and his wisdom! There seems to me to be something sublime in your being able to pronounce an edict upon one mortal's destiny. Your suitor is crouching, mademoiselle—crouching like a slave—in trembling uncertainty as to whether he is to live or die. You hold the thread of destiny—you, little Fate. Are you inclined to knot that thread, or to snap it? Pray reflect earnestly on this momentous question. For my part, I have told you twenty times my opinion on the subject. I can but repeat, that, in matrimonial matters, it is much better to esteem than to love—though the first does not in the least interfere with the latter. More than this, we know that love will come *afterwards*—little by little, step by step—on purpose to reward a young 'Rosina,' who begins (not knowing any better) by esteeming."

Separated during four years from her proscribed brother, Julie was at length, in 1796, re-united to him.

"Your old age and mine," she writes to him, "are at length, my poor brother, about to mingle their feeble current. We can now devote ourselves entirely to our dear girl" (Julie's niece), "to her youth, to her happiness, and to her establishment in life."

But Julie was not permitted to enjoy this happiness long. She died, at the age of sixty-two, in May, 1798, and after forty days of intense suffering. She died as she had lived—always true to herself, and always original. Of the last we may take as evidence the, to say the least, curious document which I have found among Beaumarchais' papers, and which I here append. The verses are entirely in his handwriting.

"Couplet written and sung by my poor sister Julie a very few hours before her death, to the tune of . . . . . [here is noted down the air of a quadrille]:—

"Je me donnerais pour deux sous
Sans marchander ma personne;
Je me céderais pour deux sous,
Me céderais même au dessons
Si l'on m'en donnait six blancs,
J'en ferais mes remerciments,
Car je me donne pour deux sous,
Sans marchander, etc. etc."*

And the old Beaumarchais adds, by way of rider to this remarkable *morceau*, the following *naïve* if not amusing reflection:—

"This may well indeed be called "*le chant du cygne*," the swan's dying song! and is the best proof of strength of mind and tranquillity of soul. This 9th May, 1798."

Little less curious is it to learn that Julie's dying-swan-like ditty gave rise to a number of responsive impromptus. Foremost among these was one by Beaumarchais himself, in a parallel strain and to the same air:—

Answer to Julie by her brother on the same air.

"Tu te mets à trop bas prix,
Nous t'estimons davantage,

* A literal translation of this eccentric confession of faith has not, for obvious reasons, been given. It may be sufficient to state that the free-spoken, if not free-thinking, lady vigorously denounces anything resembling mercenary principles in love, and that she appraises her own charms at a price which is more modest than the avowal itself can be said to be thereof.

Tu te mets à trop bas prix,
Nous en sommes tous surpris,
Dut on en être fâché,
Repoussant le marchandage.
Dut on en être faché,
Nous couvrirons le marché.
Vois ma chère,
Notre enchère :
Nous t'offrons dix mille écus."
Cette offre est encore légère,
Nous t'offrons dix mille écus
Et cent mille par dessus."

A friend of the family, named Dandet, of whom mention will be made in the matter of the Kornmann lawsuit, and who was no less a person than the grandson of Mademoiselle Lecouvreur, was not slow to rush into this competition of couplets. His effusion is unquestionably the wittiest. He offers a *ton of ducats and diamonds* as the price to be given for Mademoiselle Julie's affections; and he justifies the height of his bidding by pleading the rarity of a virtue so long and so well preserved as Julie's had been; but the idea is couched in terms that do not admit of literal reproduction here.

Beaumarchais' sister died, then, almost literally singing; it is but justice to inform those who might be shocked at the species of mirth in the face of death, that Julie was at the time a true and professing Christian; that she attended to all the duties imposed by religion; and that her will, written

at this very period, gives evidence of a grave and sincere piety.* To her friends she leaves what little property she had to dispose of; and after beseeching their prayers on her behalf, she concludes with this touching passage, addressed to Beaumarchais:—

"As to thee, my excellent brother, thee, to whom I am indebted for everything, and to whom I can give back nothing but undying thanks for all the benefits thou hast conferred on me, if it be true, as I believe it to be, that the noblest portion of our being survives the tomb, my soul, grateful and tenderly attached to thee, shall not cease to love thee through all time and through all eternity."

A few details respecting the fifth daughter of the watchmaker Caron, will complete the tableau of animated and laughing faces that surrounded the infancy and youth of Beaumarchais. Jeanne Marguerite Caron seems to have received a somewhat brilliant education. She was an excellent musician; played beautifully on the harp; had a charming voice; and, moreover, was exceedingly pretty. She was

* She bequeathed to her niece the book she had written herself, and another entitled "The Soul elevated to God." Julie writes:—"I beg you to keep them for your moments of serious reflection, and may the mercy of God and my ardent prayers afford you many such." In another portion of her will she says to one of her friends to whom she has left a token of remembrance:—"My tutelary angel will obtain mercy for me by his prayers and heavenly virtues." We must not too hastily, then, consider Julie as responsible for Dandet's impertinent impromptu; *her* couplets are simply emanations of honest and simple-minded gaiety.

fond of verse-making, like her sister Julie, and, without having so remarkable an intelligence, was endowed with the same gay and lively wit which distinguished all the family. In her infancy, and even in her adolescence, she was familiarly called "Tonton" —a diminutive of Jeanne and Jeannette. When her brother, metamorphosed into a courtier, had assumed the more graceful name of Beaumarchais, and had allowed his sister Julie to share it with him, he found for "Tonton" a pseudonym which was even more aristocratic — he christened her Mademoiselle de Boisgarnier, and it was under this name that she appeared with great success in society.

"Nothing could have been finer," writes old M. Caron to his son on the 22nd January, 1765, "nothing more cheerful than the Beaufort fête: it was an admirable instrumental concert. *Boisgarnier and Pauline shone there in their usually brilliant manner.* There was dancing after the concert and the supper; and the only thing wanting was the presence of my dear Beaumarchais."

In her girlish correspondence, Mademoiselle de Boisgarnier appears to us in the guise of a very elegant little personage—rather indolent, somewhat of a coquette, passably satirical, but nevertheless very attractive. Let us quote a single sample of her liveliness. At eighteen or nineteen years of age she appears to have accompanied her father to the medicinal waters of Pougues. Passing through Nevers,

she went to the play, and gives the following description of her travelling impressions to her sister Julie:—

"Good day to you, little sister of mine; I am, to tell the truth, as tired as a dog; we have been three days at Nevers, and we arrived wet, muddy, tired, and out of breath: verily it would have been pitiful to see us. It would be a consolation even if I could tell you of anything interesting here; but, in my examination of Nevers, I have only seen a villanous little town, very badly built and infamously paved, with, in addition, a bad theatre. In a word, Nevers is stupidity personified.* The veriest trifle is sufficient to cause a commotion among the inhabitants. Only imagine this — my little hat has attracted general attention.† Doubtless they have never seen anything like it; but they stared at it quite enough to make me angry. I have been pointed at and followed about as though I were some strange animal, without being in the least able to define the sensation which I have created. Considering that a mere nothing is sufficient to cover me with blushes, you can well comprehend that I have not found it very pleasant to be converted into an object for a thousand curious eyes to stare at. At the play, I am sure I occupied the attention of the whole house, from the rising to the falling of the curtain. Wearied at last with this, I consoled myself with the notion that as this little hat became me rather well, it gave me something of an advantage over Madame la Baillive, Madame l'Elue, and other ladies, who honoured with their presence this most pitiable theatrical

* Probably this description of Nevers might now, after the lapse of a century, be somewhat modified.

† Most probably a "Pamela" hat. (A then fashionable female head-covering, somewhat resembling the "round hat" of our seaside belles. —*Translator.*)

performance; not, I may observe, by way of parenthesis, but what they are very delighted with and proud of their wretched little theatre. I am sure that even the booths of our boulevards could never produce anything half so bad. It would have been enough to kill poor Monsigny* with vexation to have heard his music tortured and torn to pieces as it was."

After this comes the description of the play itself:—

"A comedy played in a manner absolutely horrible, by young ladies with hoarse voices, long arms, and voluminous waists, and by gentlemen made all of a piece, who wore coats which had been dyed and turned."

A comic opera, the execution of which is analyzed with similar indulgence by Mademoiselle de Boisgarnier, followed this much-abused comedy, and to this succeeded a ballet.

"'Ah, what a ballet!' cries our little Parisian. 'The stamping of the dancers' feet would have subdued the clamour of a witch's sabbath; the principal lady dancer, with a foot a yard in length, tried to give herself languishing airs, rounding two arms, which were surely made for no gesticulatory purpose. Her body, formed on the approved coalheaver's model, gave not the slightest idea of the poetry of motion; and nature refused to respond to the desperate desire she evidently possessed of making herself attractive. As to the male dancer, he with his short body and long clumsy legs, was not a whit more engaging. All this, on my honour, did not in the least please me, and I promised myself to take good care ere I submitted to the risk of such another night's amusement."

The whole of this recital is redolent of the little

* Monsigny, composer of the "Deserter" and other lyric pieces.

bourgeoise of quality, who is quite proud of having a brother secretary to the king and lieutenant-general of the royal preserves—a brother of whom she asks, a little further on, "How does our little society progress? Is the '*charming brother*' still its ornament and its delight?"

Mademoiselle Tonton was adored by and tyrannised over a meek martyr of a young man, a lover, who for a lengthened period was allowed to sigh in vain, but who at last, after years of sentimental anguish, succeeded in striking the vulnerable part of this disdainful little heart. This was the son of a king's secretary, Denis Janot by name, who, on purchasing one of those appointments, the holding of which conferred nobility, had transformed his somewhat plebeian name into that of Janot de Miron, and subsequently into de Miron alone. Beaumarchais, who had in his turn purchased the place held by the father of de Miron, was very intimate with his son. The latter, a qualified advocate of the parliament, was afterwards nominated accountant to the institution of the Dames de St. Cyr. He was an intimate friend of the Caron family, and fell deeply in love with Mademoiselle de Boisgarnier, who, without giving him a positive denial, yet found him so deficient in elegance of manner, that she did not feel very anxious to accept him as a husband. Beaumarchais, while making every allowance for his sis-

ter's scruples, could not, however, repress his sympathies on behalf of his friend, de Miron.

One day, on learning that Beaumarchais had in contemplation another husband for Mademoiselle de Boisgarnier, de Miron took offence, and wrote to him at Madrid, where he then was, a letter couched in the most indignant terms. Beaumarchais, in a moment of irritation, replied in terms of equal indignation. Mademoiselle de Boisgarnier took the part of her brother against her lover. Poor de Miron felt himself on the point of being absolutely discarded, when Beaumarchais—whose anger was never of more than momentary duration—having had time to recall all the amiable qualities of his friend, undertook in the following letter, addressed to his father, to intercede for de Miron with Mademoiselle Tonton; in this letter are admirably displayed all his good sense and good nature; and at the same time his lively and sometimes rather broad humour. It enables us, too, to form a more intimate acquaintance with his sister Boisgarnier and his friend Miron.

"Madrid, 14th January, 1765.

"Monsieur and dear Father,—I have received your last, dated the 31st December, and that of Boisgarnier, or rather the one which Boisgarnier sent by the preceding post. Her reply gave me much pleasure. I can perceive that she is only a mischievous little body, but with great parts, and great rec-

titude of mind; but if I had anything to do with the coldness that has sprung up between her protegé and herself, and if the Doctor and I are at issue on certain points, I say, to begin with, that I have no longer any angry feeling towards him, and that she on her part will do very well to imitate my example; for whatever opinion my friend may have of me, I am determined not to quarrel with him. The only thing that grieves me is, that he should speak ill of my heart. I would freely forgive whatever he might like to say of my intellect: the first will be always ready to serve him, the second to scarify him should he deserve it. I say this without any bitterness—I do not wish to offend him. But has not every one his weakness? Accordingly, be assured that far from feeling any pleasure from the intelligence that our friends cannot agree, I am much more pained by hearing it; for Miron is deficient in none of those solid qualities which would make a virtuous girl happy; and, if my little Boisgarnier thought less of that than of his wanting some frivolous accomplishments (the possession of which, I, for my part, do not deny him), I should say that Boisgarnier was a child who had not yet acquired that experience which teaches us to prefer happiness to pleasure. So, I affectionately invite my Boisgarnier to look only at our friend from that point of view in which he is truly estimable, and in a very short time, I hope, both parties will be pacified. I was furious with him for four and twenty hours; but to forget that I don't know a man that I should prefer to him either as a partner or a brother-in-law. I am perfectly ready to hear all that Boisgarnier can say against him. Granted that he plays on the viol; granted that the heels of his shoes are half-an-inch too high; granted that he murders melody when he sings; that he eats raw apples; that he is cold, pompous, and didactic in conversation; that he has a certain awkwardness of manner in everything he undertakes; still the good people of the Rue de Condé ought to be governed by other principles than these;—a wig, a waist-

coat, a pair of clogs, ought not to drive a sweetheart away when the heart is excellent and the mind upright.

"Adieu my Boisgarnier: this is a long homily for thee."

When we read this rather contemptuous eulogy of the moral qualities of poor de Miron, to the disparagement of all that can be called brilliant attributes, we must remember that Beaumarchais has declared above that the lover was not wanting in "frivolous accomplishments;" and in fact it does not appear that he was deficient in these accomplishments at all. If we are to judge by his letters—though de Miron might have been somewhat of a pedant, he was anything but a fool. There is an epistle from his pen sufficiently well turned for an advocate of the French Parliament, and in which he gives a very enticing portrait of Mademoiselle de Boisgarnier. Let us first explain the motives of this epistle. It must be remembered that M. de Miron's ancestral name was Janot, and that Mademoiselle de Boisgarnier's name was Janette Tonton. She appears to have taken rather a dislike to this name, which she considered to be vulgar, and refused to be complimentally addressed by it on her *fête* day—that of St. Jean. It was under these circumstances that the enamoured Janot de Miron pleaded on behalf of the name of his and his mistress's patron-saint. He asks whether it is from caprice or inconstancy that she wishes to abjure the saint, and entreats her to assume once more the pretty little name

which graced her childhood; after passing in review all the names which the poetical vocabulary will afford, he goes on to say that he knows very well that had she her own choice she would prefer the name of Corinne; and concludes by ridiculing all such high-flown aspirations, and declaring his readiness to assume even such a name as Pierrot, if she will be Pierrette; but that, at all events, he will be always Janot if she will be Janette.

The constancy of Janot was at length rewarded by Janette. Mademoiselle de Boisgarnier, provided by her brother's care with a suitable dowry, was married to M. de Miron in 1767. Her husband—through Beaumarchais' influence—was at a later period appointed secretary "*des commandments*" to the Prince de Condé.

Mademoiselle de Miron formed the centre figure of a most agreeable social circle. She was always happy to receive artists and literary men. In Gudin's MSS. we learn that the Abbé Delille was in the habit of reading in her salons his unpublished verses. She filled with no small credit parts in the "*parades*" or burlesque pieces composed by Beaumarchais, of which one very amusing specimen has come down to us under the title of "Jean Bête à la Foire," (Tom Fool at the Fair).* These "*parades*" were performed at

* This unpublished *parade* by Beaumarchais has little to fear from rivalry with the best *parades* by Collé; it has all the grotesque vivacity

the Château d'Etioles, the residence of M. Lenormand d'Etioles, the husband of Madame de Pompadour. At the château there might be seen at the same time, as well as Beaumarchais' sister, the Comtesse de Turpin, Réville, Dugazon and Feuilly of the Comédie Française. Mademoiselle de Miron was snatched from her family while yet in the possession of youth. She died in 1773.*

of this class of entertainments, all the wit and effrontery of equivoque, and allusion which characterise them. The prevalent taste existing in the eighteenth century for these *parades* is but a sign of the time. We can scarcely realize to ourselves now, the fact of ladies of standing in society, and often of rank and fashion, condescending, in these private theatricals, to utter sentiments couched in the language of the fish-markets. We are more reserved, more decorous in these days; but, unfortunately, it is only in words.

* Mademoiselle de Miron left one only daughter, who much resembled her mother, and who afterwards distinguished herself by a passionate love for the arts, for poetry, and, above all, for songs. In the domestic circle she was sportively called the "Muse of Orleans," from her residing at Orleans, where she was married, and endowed with a handsome portion by her uncle Beaumarchais.

CHAPTER II.

BEAUMARCHAIS' CHILDHOOD.—HIS EDUCATION.—BEAUMARCHAIS AS "CHERUBINO." — BEAUMARCHAIS TURNED OUT OF DOORS. — BEAUMARCHAIS AS A WATCHMAKER.—HIS FIRST LAWSUIT.

We have now been enabled to form an acquaintance with the perhaps obscure but certainly interesting family from which sprang the author of the "Marriage of Figaro." Our readers, we hope, have been led to appreciate the distinctive characteristics of this purely middle-class community—of this tribe of the "*petite bourgeoisie*," refined, cultivated, loving art, literature, courtly manners, courtly wit, seeking the aristocracy, intriguing to come in contact with it, with never-failing upward tendencies, and already prepared, nay, seasoned, for a system of social equality. This system, it must be avowed, notwithstanding the advantages which undoubtedly accrue from it, seems, as far as we have been enabled to judge of it from its results, and looking at it from another point of view, to have only produced abasement in the higher classes of society, without elevating in a corresponding degree, as far as regards refinement and intelli-

gence, the class to which the watchmaker Caron belonged. Accordingly I think I was right in saying that it would be very difficult in our days to find the same social elevation in an equally humble sphere.

The only boy in a family in which there were five girls, the young Caron naturally became the spoilt child of the house; his childhood was not clouded by any of that brooding melancholy which we often find to have characterised the youth of men gifted with comic genius. On the contrary, Beaumarchais' childhood was gay, sportive, roguish, the perfect reflex, in fact, of that wit and talent which were afterwards to burst forth with so much lustre. In the preface to the drama of "Cromwell," and by way of proving the necessity of an alliance between Tragedy and Comedy, M. Victor Hugo insists upon the fact that this contrast is found in the authors themselves: "Democritus," he says, "often appears in the guise of Heraclitus. *Beaumarchais was morose,* Molière was sombre, Shakespeare was melancholy.* I am sorry to combat the axiom of the illustrious poet: if it be applicable to Molière and perhaps also to Shakspeare, I deny that it can be in any way applied to Beaumarchais. It is incontestable that occasionally, during his stormy career, in disgrace and in distress,

* Whence did M. Victor Hugo derive his information as to the "melancholy" disposition of our Shakspeare?—*Translator.*

and more especially at an advanced age, there may have been moments in which Beaumarchais' mind was overshadowed with melancholy; but it is equally certain that of all men who ever held a pen this man was, it may be said, the last whom the epithet of morose would fit; nay, he is essentially undeserving of it, for he possessed to a surpassing degree the art of preserving, under circumstances the most unfortunate and the most discouraging, an extraordinary serenity, and an inexhaustible fund of imperturbable gaiety. Every one knows Voltaire's remark on Beaumarchais being obliged to defend himself against the accusation of having poisoned his three wives, when in fact he had been but twice married: "This Beaumarchais cannot be a poisoner. He is too *drôle* for that." But the remark would have been more strictly true if Voltaire had substituted "gay," "cheerful," for *drôle*. He spoke with more exactness when he said elsewhere, "I persist in thinking that a man so gay cannot belong to the family of the Locustes." That which characterises the author of the "Marriage of Figaro," and which bars for ever his being enrolled either in the family of the Locustes or with the comic writers who were "morose," consists not in his "drollery"—that quality can be artificial, and is always more or less forced—but in his frank and natural gaiety, which is not always irreproachable, it must be admitted, as re-

gards good taste, but always bears the impress of that thorough raciness which belongs much more to the temperament than to wit. With all due respect to M. Victor Hugo, then, we must maintain that Beaumarchais was born and lived fundamentally gay.

This thorough gaiety is fully shown in his correspondence with his most intimate friends, embracing a period of more than fifty years. We shall learn presently, however, that at thirteen years of age he meditated suicide through a disappointment in love; but it is very easy to discover, even from the terms in which his expressions of despair are couched, that his project of suicide at the age of thirteen was no more seriously entertained than the suicide by which it has been pretended his days were brought to a close. The joyous and sprightly character of Beaumarchais when a child is especially proved by the letters of his sister Julie, who devotes more than one page both in prose and verse to the narration of the boyish frolics of her youthful brother. I can only find space for one single specimen of these several reminiscences, written, by the way, in very bad verse, but which appears to be the earliest composed of all her similar effusions. The composition of this little poem is dated as far back as the time when Beaumarchais was still a watchmaker's apprentice, and he is called in it by his early name of Caron. Julie thus

commences—on the somewhat hackneyed model of the *Æneid* and *Henriade*—

> "I sing the times of childish innocence,*
> And all the pleasures of our happy youth,
> So joyous, and so well divided with
> Our dearest friends the Bellangés . . ."

It is evident that the verse is not very rich as regards rhyme, and that the poetical talent of Julie leaves considerable room for improvement; but to this exordium follows a vigorous portrayal of the escapades of young Caron, who it appears, *"fait comme un diable"*—plays the very devil—commanding a band of little good for-nothings, always roving about either to plunder the larder, notwithstanding the sturdy resistance of Margot the cook, or at night, on returning from their gambols abroad, to disturb the slumbers of the peaceful inhabitants of the Rue St. Denis. This poem, puerile in itself, merits, however, to be reproduced here, as it is full of details which show us how truly the child was father to the man in Beaumarchais' case; these details demonstrate how, predestined, as it were, to litigation, and fated at last to glean from successive

* Je chante ces temps d'innocence,
Et ses plaisirs de notre enfance,
Si vifs, et toujours partagés,
Avec nos amis Bellangé.

lawsuits both his fortune and his fame, the young Beaumarchais, as though he had a presentiment of the future, had a remarkable partiality, even in his childish games, for that peculiar species of occupation, which was afterwards to have so great and serious an influence over his mature age. The future adversary of Goëzman appears to us in this family picture by his sister, not as plaintiff or defendant but as judge. She describes him sitting on his judgment seat duly equipped in robe and wig, but his frolicsome humour soon gets the better of his judicial gravity, he overwhelms his auditory with an avalanche of fisticuffs and blows with tongs and shovel, and the tribunal at last breaks up in confusion.

We see from this description that the child Beaumarchais loved to enact his own part of "Bridoison;" only it was a Bridoison rather more addicted to practical joking than the judge in the "Marriage of Figaro;" his "*fa-a-eon de parler*" is much more strongly accentuated. It must not be imagined, however, that the whole of our hero's youth was spent in larder-sacking and romping. The paternal Caron, to whose religious tendencies we have already adverted, brought up his family in all the practices of religion, and endeavoured strongly, though without success, to turn the mind of his son towards sentiments of piety.

"My father," writes Beaumarchais in a hitherto unpublished memorandum, "used to conduct us all relentlessly to high

mass; and when by chance I happened to arrive after the Epistle was over, I was mulcted of twelve sous out of my four francs, which made up my monthly pocket money. If my arrival was delayed as late as the termination of the Gospel, twenty-four sous was the fine; and appearance after the Elevation was visited with the forfeiture of the whole four livres; so that it very frequently happened that at the end of the month I found a deficiency of from six to eight livres in my financial budget."

It will naturally be asked what kind of education the young Caron received, where he was instructed, what sort of schoolboy life he led.

"I cannot understand the reason," writes Gudin, "why Beaumarchais' father did not send him to the University, or place him under the care of the Jesuits: these semi-monks, excellent instructors of youth, by the way, who would soon have perceived the peculiar bent of Beaumarchais' genius, and have trained the youthful branch in the right direction; but by some inexplicable circumstance he was sent to the school of Alfort. Here he certainly acquired more knowledge than there was any idea of imparting to him; but his tutors never suspected his brilliant though latent capacity; he was even for a long period unaware of it himself, and had almost made up his mind to resign himself to the condition of a person having the capacity of loving and appreciating whatever is beautiful either in nature or in art; but nothing more. His father soon recalled him from school; the old man was determined to bring him up to his own calling, and to leave him an establishment ready prepared for him."

Gudin's mention of the Ecole d'Alfort, without giving it any other designation, had at first reminded me of sundry passages in the "Marriage of Figaro," in

which allusion is made to the hero having been in old times a veterinary surgeon, and I asked myself the question, whether, by chance, the young Caron could have been destined by his father "to make sick animals more wretched," (as Figaro says,) before entering on a different career. But, on examination, I find that the veterinary school of Alfort was only founded in 1767, in other words, at an epoch when Beaumarchais was thirty-five years of age; thus, the supposition of his ever having studied the veterinary art falls to the ground of itself. We must, therefore, conclude from the information given by Gudin that there existed circâ 1742, at Alfort, some educational establishment having no connection either with the university or with the Society of Jesus, and where Beaumarchais' father must have placed his son. However, some letters of the latter throw considerable doubts on the truth of this hypothesis; in one he speaks of his walks about Paris on the outdoor holidays, which would seem to indicate that he was in some college in the capital, unless, indeed, he had been previously recalled from Alfort; in another letter written to Mirabeau in 1790, and which we shall quote in its proper place, Beaumarchais narrates how at the age of twelve, when about to receive his first communion, he was taken to the convent of the Minimes, which then existed in the wood of Vincennes, where he took a violent fancy

to an old monk, who lectured him at great length, seasoning his sermon, however, with a succulent repast. "I used to hasten there," adds Beaumarchais, "every holiday." This is somewhat at variance, perhaps, with the assertion of Gudin. Nevertheless, it might still be argued that the little scholar used to come from Alfort to Paris on holidays, and that he passed through the wood of Vincennes on his way to the Rue St. Denis. This, however, seems positive, that Beaumarchais' stay at school or college was of very short duration—he left at thirteen years of age. I have found among his papers a curious document, which confirms this fact, and which, in addition, places us in a position to pronounce upon the state of intellectual and moral culture of which, at the age of thirteen, the future dramatist was possessed. Thirteen years of age!—exactly the age of "Cherubino!"

An ingenious, but sometimes adventurous philologist, M. Génin, affirms that the character of "Cherubino" is not an original creation, but is borrowed from one of the prettiest romances of the middle ages, "Le Petit Jehan de Saintré"—"Little John of Saintré."* He even goes the length of saying that Count Almaviva's page *is but a copy of La Petit Jehan.* I am not of opinion that Beaumarchais had ever read the "Petit Jehan," at least in the crabbed text

* Des variations du langage Français depuis le XIIme siècle, par F. Génin, p. 369.

of Antonio de la Sale, who was very little known in the eighteenth century. If he was acquainted with this novel, he could only have known it through the extract made from it by Tressan, and which was published for the first time in 1780, in the "Library of Romances." It is indeed possible that Tressan's book may have given the author of the "Marriage of Figaro" the idea of representing a page in love with a lady of quality; but independently of this general analogy, I can see no resemblance between the timid damoisel of the fifteenth century, whose secret the *Dame des belles cousines* has so much trouble in extracting, who has so much need of encouragement although he is "already sixteen and three months," and the pert scapegrace of the eighteenth century, who when only thirteen makes love to Susanna, Fanchette, and even to old Marceline, simply, as he says, "because she is a woman," and who would very readily make love to his godmother herself if she would only throw aside a little of her dignity.* Cherubino, in spite of his middle-age costume, is essentially modern, and has unmistakeably the stamp of the period in which the character appeared. In order to create this character, which is that of a

* Although, in consequence of the extreme complaisance of the *Dame des belles cousines*, little Jehan becomes more guilty than Cherubino, he begins by being far more innocent. I look in vain for the similarity which Monsieur Génin declares to exist between the story of La Sale and the "Marriage of Figaro:" there is no resemblance between the scenes, any more than between the characters.

precocious, witty, and tolerably impertinent boy, Beaumarchais had no need to go back to the fifteenth century; it was sufficient for him to consult his own recollections, and to represent himself at the age of thirteen, for he was quite the original of the page in the "Marriage of Figaro," at least as far as concerns his moral nature.

The first production which came from the pen of the real Cherubino is a letter in a mixture of prose and verse, written by Beaumarchais at the age of thirteen, to his two sisters in Spain. This production is doubly interesting, from the fact of its bearing the comments of the author at sixty-six years of age. A general observation by Beaumarchais, the old man, explains the letter of Beaumarchais, the young boy, in these words:—

"First literary and absurd production, by a scamp of thirteen, who was just leaving school, to his two sisters who had recently gone to Spain. According to the custom at public schools, I had been more occupied with Latin verses than with the rules of French versification. A man has always to recommence his education on getting free from the pedants. This was copied by my poor sister Julie, who was between eleven and twelve years of age, and in whose papers I find it after more than fifty years.

"Prairial, An. VI. (May, 1798)."

This remark of Beaumarchais is intended as an excuse for all inaccuracies which occur in his French verses. I doubt whether the pupil ever made much

progress in Latin poetry, although at a later period he appears rather prodigal of Latin quotations in his writings. However, to appreciate the astonishing precocity of intellect and sentiment which is shown in this letter, the reader should not forget that it comes from a child of thirteen, and from a child whose regular education had been somewhat neglected.

" Dame Guilbert et compagnie*
J'ai reçu la lettre polie
Qui par vous me fut adressée
Et je me sens l'âme pressée
D'une telle reconnaissance,
Qu'en Espagne tout comme en France
Je vous aime de tout mon cœur
Et tiens à un très-grand honneur
D'être votre ami, votre frère
Songez à moi à la prière.

" Your letter has given me the greatest pleasure, and has rescued me from a dull feeling of melancholy which had

Dame Guilbert and friends,
I have received the polite letter
Which was addressed to me by you,
And I feel my soul moved
By so much gratitude
That in Spain as in France
I love you with all my heart,
And hold it a very great honour
To be your friend and brother.
Think of me at your prayers.

(It will be remembered that Madame Guilbert was Beaumarchais' eldest sister.)

oppressed me for some time, and which was rendering my life a burden. I can say with truth:—

Que souvent il me prend envie
D'aller au bout de l'univers,
Eloigné des hommes pervers
Passer le reste de ma vie !*

"The news I received from you begins to shed a little light on my misanthropic condition; whilst diverting my mind, the easy and amusing style of Lisette† changes my black disposition insensibly into a soft languor, so that without giving up my notion of retirement, it appears to me that a companion of a different sex could not fail to throw a charm over my existence.

A ce projet l'esprit se monte,
Le cœur s'y trouve aussi son compte,
Et, dans ces châteaux en Espagne,
Voudrait avoir gente compagne
Qui joignît à mille agréments
De l'esprit et des traits charmants;
Beau corsage à couleur d'ivoire,
Des ses yeux sûrs de leur victoire,
Tels qu'on en voit en toi Guilbert:
Je lui voudrais cet air ouvert,
Cette taille fine et bien faite
Qu'on remarque dans la Lisette;
Je lui voudrais de plus la fraîcheur de Fanchon,‡
Car, comme bien savez, quand on prend du galon. . .

* Often I am seized with a desire
To go to the end of the universe,
Far away from perverse men,
To pass the rest of my life.

† Beaumarchais' second sister, Clavijo's betrothed.

‡ At this project my imagination takes flight,
My heart is also interested in it,

"But for fear you should reproach me with looking too much at the physical side, and neglecting positive advantages for passing charms, I will add that—

"Je voudrais qu'avec tant de grâce
Elle eût l'esprit de la Bécasse†
Un certain goût pour la paresse
Qu'on reproche à Tonton sans cesse

And in its castles in the air
Would not be without its gentle companion,
Who should join to a thousand delights
Wit and charming features;
A beautiful bust, the colour of ivory,
Those eyes which are sure of their victory,
Such as you possess, my Guilbert.
I should wish her to have that frank expression,
That slender and well-made figure,
Which we remark in Lisette;
I should also wish her to have the freshness of Fanchon,
For as you know, &c.

(Fanchon was Beaumarchais' third sister.)

* * * * *

* I should wish that with all this grace
She might have the wit of la Bécasse.
A certain taste for idleness
With which Tonton is incessantly reproached
Would be sufficiently becoming to my Iris;
In my retirement, troubled by no cares,
We should pass our days in idleness and love.

† The name of *la bécasse*, in the second line, is given by antiphrasis to Julie, the fourth and wittiest of the sisters; *bécasse* — literally woodcock—being here used as a synonym of goose. *Tonton*, in the fourth line, is the fifth sister, who was afterwards Madame de Miron.

A mon Iris siérait assez,
Dans mon réduit où, jamais occupés,
Nous passerions le jour à ne rien faire,
La nuit à nous aimer, voilà notre ordinaire."

"But what madness on my part to talk to you about my reveries. I do not know whether it is on account of their success with you that I do so; but reveries concerning the sex, above all things! I, who ought to detest everything that wears a petticoat, for the evil the race has done me.* But, patience, I am now out of their power; the best plan is never to get into it again."

The rest of the epistle is not in the most delicate taste, and it even contains passages which it would be difficult to quote, and which sufficiently justify the epithet of scamp, as applied by Beaumarchais to himself, an epithet which he also applies to Cherubino in the preface to the "Marriage of Figaro." What I have said is, I think, sufficient to establish relationship between the boys of Count Almaviva and the son of Caron the watchmaker. The child was in his thirteenth year when his father interrupted his studies, in order to direct his attention altogether to watchmaking. Under his tuition he learnt to make watches, *to measure time*, as he said in after life. We

* On the subject of this passage, written when he was thirteen years old, Beaumarchais adds in a note: "I had been in love with a thoughtless girl, who laughed at me for my youth, and had just got married. I wanted at the time to kill myself." The tone of this letter, however, indicates that there was not much to be feared from his attack of amorous despair.

shall, indeed, see that an exact calculation of time and circumstances was always one of the principal elements of his power and success.

In the meanwhile it may be imagined that the Cherubino of the Rue St. Denis had rather a wild time of it, and that the watchmaker's apprentice became the model of all others. With a violent passion for music, which made him neglect his profession, he combined other less innocent tastes, and old M. Caron had some trouble in softening down his impetuous and somewhat dissolute disposition. In one of the numerous pamphlets, which during the period of his opulence and celebrity were flying incessantly about him, he is represented at the age of eighteen as driven out of his father's house, and pursuing the profession of a juggler. That, however, was simply an invention. The only true part of the story is his expulsion from his father's house, although, at the same time, this expulsion was only intended to be a temporary one. Old M. Caron not being able to do anything with his son, decided one day to resort to strong measures; he pretended to turn him out of the house, but without throwing him on his own resources; for young Caron was at once received by certain relations and friends, who were in the secret of the father's plans. He wrote letters of the most supplicatory kind to his father, who, however, resisted for some time. At last, when he

thought the lesson had been sufficiently severe, he allowed himself to be overcome by his wife's entreaties, and those of the sisters, cousins, and friends of the exile. A treaty of peace was concluded between him and his son, on the subjoined conditions, which will give some idea of the influence which was still exercised in the eighteenth century by the heads of families and professions, while they will at the same time enable the reader to form a correct idea of the faults which had been committed by the young apprentice. The following is the letter in which the father informs his son that he may return to the house.

"I have read and re-read your last letter. M. Cottin* has also shown me the one you sent to him. The letters appear reasonable; the sentiments to which you give utterance would meet with my unlimited admiration if I could only look upon them as durable, for I take it for granted that they are expressed with sincerity. Your great misfortune consists in having entirely lost my confidence; however, the friendship and regard which I entertain for the three estimable friends, to whose intervention you have had recourse, and the gratitude I owe them for the kindness they have shown you, induce me to give my consent in spite of myself, although I am convinced that there are four chances to one against your fulfilling your promises. Accordingly, you see what an irremediable evil it would be for your reputation if I had to send you away again.

"Understand, then, on what conditions you are to return. I must have a full and entire submission to my wishes, and marked respect in words, actions, and behaviour. Remember,

* A Banker, who was a friend and relative of the Caron family.

that if you do not exert yourself as much to please me as you have done to gain the good will of my friends, you will have proved nothing, absolutely nothing, and will only have worked against yourself. I wish not only to be obeyed and respected, but I wish you to think beforehand of what will be likely to please me.

"As regards your mother, who has urged me twenty times during the last fortnight to take you back, I shall wait for a private conversation with you to make you understand how much affection and solicitude you owe to her. These, then, are to be the conditions of my receiving you;—

"1. You shall make nothing, sell nothing, cause nothing to be made or sold, directly or indirectly, except on my account; and you must no longer give way to the temptation of appropriating to yourself anything which belongs to me; you must have nothing, absolutely nothing, but what I give you; you must receive neither watches nor anything else to repair, under no matter what pretext, for no matter what friend, without giving me notice of it; you must never undertake anything without giving me due notice; you must not even sell an old key without accounting to me for it.

"2. You must get up in the summer at six o'clock, and in the winter at seven; you must work until supper-time without repugnance; at whatever I give you to do you must employ the talents which Heaven has bestowed upon you, entirely with a view to becoming celebrated in your profession. Remember, that it will be shameful and dishonourable for you to occupy a low position in it, and that if you do not occupy the highest, you will deserve no sort of respect; the love of so fine a profession ought alone to penetrate your heart and occupy your mind.

"3. You must go to no more supper-parties, nor go out at all in the evening; such amusements are dangerous for you; but, I consent to your dining with your friends on Sundays and holidays, on condition that I always know where you are

going, and that you are always at home before nine. I recommend you at the present moment never to ask permission to break through this article, and I should advise you not to do so of your own accord.

"4. You must give up your unhappy music altogether, and, above all, must forsake the company of young men, for I will not allow you to associate with one of them. These two things have been your ruin. However, in consideration of your weakness, I will allow you a violin and a flute, but on the express condition that you only play them on working days after supper, and never in the day time, and that you do so without disturbing the tranquillity of the neighbours and my own.*

"5. I shall avoid sending you out as much as possible; but, in case I should be obliged to do so by my business, remember that I shall never accept any insufficient excuse for your delays; you know beforehand how much they would annoy me.

"6. I shall allow you your board and eighteen francs a month, which will give you pocket-money, and enable you by degrees to pay your debts. It would not suit your disposition, and it would be unbecoming on my part, to make you pay for your board, and to credit you with the value of your work. If you devote yourself, as you ought to do, to the interests of my business, and if you obtain any orders by means of your own talents, I will give you a quarter share in the profit of whatever work you are instrumental in bringing;

* What an excellent man was old M. Caron! Is there an individual in Paris sufficiently unfortunate to be under the same roof with several pianos, who ever met with a father of a family so solicitous above everything for the tranquillity of the neighbours? Old M. Caron little thought, however, that his son's passion for music, which appeared to him under so fatal an aspect, was destined to be far more profitable to him than watchmaking.

you know my disposition, and you must be aware from your own experience that I do not like to yield to another person in generosity; entitle yourself, then, to receive more from me than I have promised; but, remember that henceforth I set no value on words, I reckon actions alone.

"If my conditions suit you, if you consider yourself capable of executing them in good faith, accept them, and sign your acceptance at the foot of this letter, which you are to send back to me; and in this case assure M. Paignon of my esteem and gratitude: tell him that I will do myself the honour to take dinner with him to-morrow, and prepare to return with me, and resume a place which I thought you could not have occupied so soon, if you ever did so at all."

Conformably to the paternal commands, young Caron writes on the same piece of paper the following declaration:—

"Monsieur and honoured Father,—I sign all your conditions in the full intention of executing them, with the assistance of the Lord; but how sadly all this recalls to me the time when these conditions and laws were far from being necessary to make me do my duty.* It is just that I should suffer humiliation, which I have really deserved; and if this, and my good conduct, can induce you to give me back your kindness and affection, I shall be only too happy. In faith of which I sign all that is contained in the above letter.

"A. Caron, fils."

* Cherubino, at the age of eighteen imploring *the assistance of the Lord*, in order to soften down the severity of his father, is in itself a good piece of comedy, particularly as the young scape-grace lets out in the next sentence his annoyance at being treated, as he considers, like a child; but, taking it all and all, there is a tone of sincere respect in this letter which is not very common in the present day.

This stroke of authority produced its effect; young Caron felt his honour at stake, gave himself up entirely to the study of watchmaking, and by way of proving to his father that he was capable of attaining the highest position in his art, at the age of twenty he had already discovered a new system of escapement* for watches. A watchmaker, then celebrated, named Lepaute, to whom he had communicated his invention, undertook to appropriate it, and announced it as his own in a number of the "Mercure," dated September 1753. He flattered himself that he could easily deal with an obscure young man; but this young man was one of those vigorous and tenacious dispositions who do not let go their hold very easily. We have beneath our eyes the principal documents relating to the lawsuit to which this dispute gave rise, and which formed the commencement of his fortune and celebrity. As soon as Lepaute's announcement appeared, young Caron wrote the following letter to the "Mercure," and it was printed in the number for December 1753, from which I extract it. It is the first communication made by Beaumarchais to the public, and has never been reproduced.

"I read, Sir, with the greatest astonishment, in your num-

* "The 'escapement' is "that part of a watch or clock by which the circulating motion of the wheels is converted into a vibrating one, as that of the pendulum in a clock or the balance of a watch."—WEBSTER.

ber for September 1753, that M. Lepaute, watchmaker to the Luxembourg, announces as his invention a new escapement for watches and clocks, which he says he has had the honour of presenting to the king and the Academy.

"It is too important, for the sake of truth and my own reputation, that I should claim this invention, and not remain silent on the subject of a breach of faith.

"It is true that on the 23rd of last July, in the joy produced by my discovery, I had the weakness to intrust this escapement to M. Lepaute, that he might make use of it in a clock which M. de Julienne had ordered from him, and the inside of which he assured me would be seen by no one, as he was fitting it up with his pneumatic winding apparatus, and would alone have the key. But could I imagine that M. Lepaute would ever think fit to appropriate this escapement, which, as I show, had been confided to him under a pledge of secrecy!

"I do not wish to take the public by surprise, nor to induce it to take my side on the strength of my simple statement, but I earnestly beg it not to give any credit to M. Lepaute's assertions, until the Academy has decided between us, and determined which of us is the author of the new escapement. M. Lepaute seems to wish to avoid discussion; he declares that his escapement, which I have not seen, bears no resemblance to mine; but from what he says in his announcement I imagine that it is exactly like it in principle; and that, if the commissioners whom the Academy may appoint to hear our contradictory statements find any difference in them, it will be found to proceed merely from some faults in construction in his machinery, which will help to expose the theft.

"I do not publish any of my proofs; it is necessary the commissioners should hear them for the first time in all their force; so that, whatever M. Lepaute may say or write against me, I shall maintain a profound silence until the Academy has been made acquainted with the matter, and pronounced its decision.

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"The judicious public will be kind enough to wait until then. I hope for this favour from its justness, and from the patronage which it accords to the arts. I venture to flatter myself, Sir, that you will consent to insert this letter in your next paper.

"CARON the Younger, Watchmaker, Rue St. Denis, near St. Catherine's.

"Paris, Nov. 15th, 1753."

Lepaute replied with a letter, in which, after calling attention very complacently to his various talents, his high connexions, and his numerous orders, he tried to crush young Caron in his obscurity beneath the weight of a certificate, signed by three Jesuits and the Chevalier de la Morlière. Thereupon came a fresh letter from Beaumarchais in the month of January 1754, in which he appeals again to more competent judges and to the Academy of Sciences. The dispute having made a certain noise, the Count of St. Florentin, minister of the king's household, did in fact call upon the Academy of Sciences to decide between these two watchmakers. Beaumarchais' address to the Academy, of which I possess the minute, contains the following fragment, which is curious from the solemn and respectful tone with which the young watchmaker speaks of his profession, like a worthy pupil of his father.

"Instructed I have been by my father from the age of thirteen, in the art of watchmaking; and animated by his example and advice to occupy myself seriously in endeavour-

ing to perfect the art, it will not appear surprising that when only nineteen I tried to distinguish myself in it, and to entitle myself to the esteem of the public. Escapements were the first objects of my attention. To do away with their existing defects, simplify them, and perfect them; such was the aim which excited my ambition. • My enterprise was doubtless a rash one: so many great men, whom the application of an entire life will probably not render me capable of equalling, had worked at it without ever arriving at the point so much desired, that I ought not to have flattered myself I should ever succeed. But youth is presumptuous; and shall I not be excusable, gentlemen, if your approbation crowns my work? But what would be my grief if M. Lepaute succeeded in taking from me the glory of a discovery which you had crowned. * * * I say nothing of the insults which M. Lepaute writes and circulates against my father and myself. Such things generally indicate a desperate cause, and I know that they always cover their originator with disgrace. For the present, gentlemen, it will be sufficient for me if your judgment secures to me the glory which my adversary wishes to deprive me of, and which I hope to receive from your justice and enlightenment.

"CARON the Younger."

The Academy of Sciences appointed two commissioners to examine into the question, and at the end of their report, which is very long, and which I will not inflict on the reader—decided the matter in favour of young Caron, in the following words:—

Extract from the Registers of the Royal Academy of Sciences, February 23, 1754.

"MM. Camus and Montigny, who were appointed commissioners for examining into the question which had arisen

between MM. Caron and Lepaute on the subject of an escapement, which they both claim to have invented, and the decision of which had been referred by the Count de St. Florentin to the Academy of Sciences, having made their report, the Academy have decided that M. Caron must be looked upon as the real author of the new watch escapement, and that M. Lepaute only imitated this invention; that the clock escapement presented to the Academy on the 4th August by M. Lepaute, is a natural consequence of the watch-escapement invented by M. Caron; that in its application to clocks, this escapement is inferior to that of Graham; but that for watches it is the most perfect yet invented, although it is at the same time the most difficult to make.

"The Academy confirmed this decision in its meetings of the 20th and 23rd of February, in faith of which I have delivered the present certificate to M. Caron, with a copy of the report, conformably with the result of the decision of the 2nd of March.

"Paris, March 4th, 1754.

"(Signed) GRAND-JEAN DE FOUCHY,
"Perpetual Secretary of the Royal Academy of Sciences."

Thus ended Beaumarchais' first suit which he gained, as he was destined to gain so many others. This one having given the young artist a certain notoriety, he took care to cultivate it; and a year afterwards, with the apparent view of doing justice to another watchmaker, named Romilly, he addressed to the "Mercure" a letter containing the following ingenious species of "puff" for himself:—

"Paris, June 16, 1755.

"Sir,—I am a young artist, who have only the honour of being known to the public by the invention of a new escape-

ment for watches, which the Academy has honoured with its approbation, and which the journals spoke of last year. This success has decided me to remain a watchmaker, and I limit all my ambition to acquiring a thorough knowledge of my art. I have never looked with an envious eye on the productions of my fellow watchmakers—this letter proves it; but unfortunately I cannot, without impatience, see myself deprived of those slight advantages which study and perseverance have enabled me to gain. It was my warmth of temperament, of which I am afraid age does not cure me, that made me defend with so much ardour the legitimate claim which I had to my own invention of the escapement, when it was disputed about eighteen months since * * *

"I take advantage of this opportunity to reply to some objections which have been made to my escapement in various publications. It has been said that when this escapement is used, the watches cannot be made either flat or small, which, if it were true, would render the best escapement known very inconvenient."

Some technical details follow, after which Beaumarchais concludes in these words:—

"By this means I make watches as flat as can be desired, flatter than they have ever yet been made, while this advantage does not in any way diminish their goodness. The first of these simplified watches is in the hands of the king; his Majesty has worn it a year, and is very pleased with it. If the first objection can be answered by facts, the second can be replied to in the same manner. I had the honour to present Madame de Pompadour, a few days since, with a watch in a ring, of this new and simplified make—the smallest which has ever been constructed; it is only four lines and a half in diameter, and two-thirds of a line in height between the plates. To render the

thing more convenient, I have substituted for the usual key a hoop all round the dial plate, from which a little hook stands out; by pulling this hook with the nail, about two-thirds round the dial plate, you wind up the watch, and it goes thirty hours. Before taking it to Madame de Pompadour, I saw that it corresponded exactly with my clock which marks the seconds for five days. Accordingly with my escapement, and my mode of construction, excellent watches can be made as flat and as small as may be thought fit.

"I have the honour, &c.

"CARON the Younger, Watchmaker to the King."

This letter and signature prove that young Caron has already made a certain progress: instead of signing himself "Watchmaker" simply, he now signs "Watchmaker to the King." He has his *entrées* to the Château of Versailles, not as a musician, which has been often stated, but, in the first instance, as watchmaker to the king, princes, and princesses. In order to show thoroughly what his position was at the time, we will quote another passage from a letter written by him to one of his cousins who was a watchmaker in London, dated July 31, 1754:—

"I have at last delivered the watch to the king, by whom I was fortunate enoung to be recognized at once;* and who remembered my name. His Majesty commanded me to wind

* This passage indicates that Beaumarchais had already seen Louis XV.; on what occasion I cannot say, but, doubtless, in the capacity of watchmaker, and probably after his victory over Lepaute before the Academy of Sciences.

it up, and explain it to all the courtiers who were at the *levée*, and never did his Majesty receive any artist with so much kindness: he wished to understand every detail. It was then that I had occasion to offer you many thanks for the microscope, which every one considered admirable. The king made use of it to examine the watch in Madame de Pompadour's ring, which is only four lines in diameter, and which was much admired, although it is not finished. The king asked me to make him a repeater, in the same style on which I am at present engaged. All the courtiers follow the example of the king, and each one wishes to be attended to first. I have also made Mademoiselle Victoire a curious little clock, in the style of my watches, which the king wished to make her a present of: it has two dials, and shows the time whichever way you look at it. * * * Remember, my dear cousin, that this is a young man whom you have taken under your patronage, and who, through your kindness, hopes to become a member of the Society of London. What obligations I should be under to you, if you would occupy yourself about it with your friends."

Here finishes the first period of Beaumarchais' life. He is as yet only a young watchmaker; but this young watchmaker can at the same time distinguish himself in his art, assert his own position, and defend himself. His first step in his profession is a discovery, and his first polemical essay is a triumph over an adversary who is apparently a much more redoubtable person than himself. The position of Beaumarchais is about to be altered, but his qualities will remain the same. A woman's love is about to open suddenly a new career before him, for which he

did not seem to have been made: in it he will exhibit that mixture of perspicacity, energy, elasticity, and obstinacy, which characterize him; and in a more vast and more elevated sphere we shall recognize the clever combatant whose first struggle and first triumph we have just narrated.

CHAPTER III.

BEAUMARCHAIS' APPEARANCE AT COURT.—COURT TITLES.—THE CONTROLLER OF THE PANTRY.—BEAUMARCHAIS' FIRST MARRIAGE.—HIS POSITION WITH "MESDAMES DE FRANCE."—THE INEXPERT WATCHMAKER.—A DUEL WITHOUT SECONDS.—A DEBT OF HONOUR.—BEAUMARCHAIS' LITERARY EDUCATION.

UNTIL the age of twenty-four, young Caron's ambition was limited to selling large numbers of watches to the king, the princes, and the courtiers. How did he obtain the idea of stepping over the boundary which separated him from the aristocracy, and becoming a noble? This is the proper place for introducing an unpublished sketch by Gudin, which appears to have been made from life. "As soon as Beaumarchais appeared at Versailles, the women were struck with his lofty stature, his slender and elegant figure, the regularity of his features, his bright animated complexion, his confident bearing, that air of command which seemed to raise him above all who surrounded him, and finally, with that involuntary ardour which he exhibited on their appearance."

It is easy to see from this portrait that modesty was never the prevailing characteristic of Beaumarchais' physiognomy, and that if he was calculated to please the ladies of the period, who

were rather fond of the kind of beauty depicted to us by Gudin, he must on the other hand have had less success with the men, and have obtained at an early period that reputation for coxcombry which may be said to have been the cause of all the bad feeling exhibited towards him. This animosity interfered with his own tranquillity and with his reputation, and made him exclaim in one of his old Memorials against Goezman: "But if I was a coxcomb, does it follow that I was an ogre?"

However, in 1755, young Caron being nothing but a watchmaker, was not in a position to make the courtiers who ordered watches from him take umbrage. He began then by reaping the benefits of his good looks, without in the first instance experiencing any of their ill effects. A lady, who had seen him at Versailles, called upon him in Paris, at his shop, in the Rue St. Denis, on the pretext of bringing him a watch to repair. She was not exactly a noble lady, she was the wife of an officer of the king's pantry, *contrôleur de la bouche*, or, to be more dignified and more exact, of a *contrôleur clerc d'office de la maison du roi*, who, by the way, had the same Christian name as Beaumarchais, being called Pierre Augustin Franquet. The office held by the husband was one of the thousand functions attached to the court, which our kings used to create formerly, when they were in want of money, and which, when they had once been sold,

could be transmitted by the holder to heirs or to other purchasers, if the prince gave his consent. It is with reference to this that Montesquieu says in his "Lettres Persanes," "The King of France has no gold mines like the King of Spain, his neighbour; but he has far greater wealth in the vanity of his subjects, which is more inexhaustible than any mine. He has been known to undertake or continue a war without any resources but the titles of honour which he had to sell, and, owing to a miracle of human conceit, his troops were paid, his towns fortified, and his fleet equipped." Those who would wish to form an idea of the immense variety of these court places, have only to consult one of the almanacks which were published before the Revolution, under the title of "Almanac de Versailles:" they will find all sorts of burlesque offices, such as *Cravat-tyer in Ordinary to the King*, or *Captain of the Greyhounds of the Chamber*, which had probably cost more money than they gave work to the holders.*

* In the "Etat de la France" for 1749, (vol. i. p. 273) there is a whole chapter entitled, "Greyhounds of the Chamber." The *captain* is M. Zachaire, de Vassan, and Michel de Vassan, his son, is his appointed successor. He receives 2466 francs for his wages. There are also three *valets* and guards attached to the Greyhounds of the Chamber. There are, moreover, the *little dogs of the King's Chamber*, who are under the care of M. Antoine, that gentleman receiving 1446 francs as wages, besides 200 francs for his livery. The pastry cook of the king has to provide seven biscuits a-day for his Majesty's little dogs.

The controller, whose wife had taken notice of Beaumarchais, was very old and infirm. The wife herself was no longer in the bloom of youth. It appears from one of Beaumarchais' notes, that she was six years' older than himself, and consequently, in 1755, she was thirty; but she was still very beautiful, and when she came blushingly with her watch to Beaumarchais, there was no need to tell him to bring it back himself. "The young artist," says Gudin, "politely claimed the honour of bringing back the watch as soon as he had repaired it. This event, which appeared an ordinary one, had an effect on his life, and gave him a new existence."

At the end of some months, M. Franquet confessed that his old age and infirmities prevented him from performing his functions as controller in a suitable manner, and that he could not do better than give up the place to young Caron, in consideration of an annuity which was guaranteed by the father.

With this new career open to him, the young watchmaker gave up his profession, and was invested with the functions of controller, by a royal patent, dated November 9, 1755.* This, the first office at

* The following is an extract from the patent, in which Beaumarchais is called Caron only:—"On the part of the king.—To the grand-master of France, first master and ordinary masters of our hotel; masters and controllers of our pantry and account-room, greeting—On the good and trust-worthy report which has been made to us, of

court, held by Beaumarchais, differed from the others so far that it was not absolutely a sinecure. Under the direction of the controller in ordinary of the royal mantle, were sixteen clerks, controllers of the pantry, who were employed every quarter, four at a time. Their functions are described as follows in the "Etat de la France" for 1749: "They keep the ordinary and extraordinary books of the expenses of the king's household, and have a voice and a seat in the bureau. They have six hundred francs in wages, of which they only receive four hundred and fifty, and liveries in kind, making altogether about 1500 francs. The controllers are attached to the bureau on the days when the large staff is not carried; they serve at the king's table with their swords by their sides, and place the dishes on the table with their own hands. Subordinately to the officers of the hotel and the other superior officers, they direct the seven pantries of the palace,

the honour of Pierre-Augustin Caron, and of his zeal and affection for our service; on account of this we have this day appointed him, and by these presents signed with our hand do now appoint him to the office of one of the clerk-controllers of the pantry of our household, left vacant by the resignation of Pierre-Augustin Francquet, its last holder, to be possessed and exercised by him; whereof he shall enjoy and use all the honours, authority, privileges, freedom, liberties, wages, rights, &c.

"Given at Versailles, under the seal of our trust, November 9, 1755. LOUIS.

"And, lower down, by the king,

"Signed PHELIPPEAUX."

the officers of which owe them obedience in all matters relating to their functions. They take their meals at the table of the masters of the hotel, or at that of the former grand-master. One of those who are waiting on the king is also entitled to eat at the table of the almoners." In the rules drawn up for his household in 1681, by Louis XIV., and kept up by his successors, we find, in article 21, these directions:—"His Majesty's meat shall be carried in the following order: two of the guards shall march first, afterwards the usher of the hall, the master of the hotel with his staff, the gentleman (*gentilhomme*) serving as bread-bearer, the controller-general, *the clerk controller of the pantry* and those who carry the meat, the groom of the kitchen, the keeper of the plate, &c." Fancy the future author of the "Marriage of Figaro" at his post, and in the exercise of his functions, with his sword at his side, walking before His Majesty's meat previously to placing it himself on the table!

Two months after Beaumarchais' entrance at the court, on the third of January, 1756, the old man who had sold his place died of apoplexy; and eleven months afterwards, on the 22nd November, 1756, young Caron married Francquet's widow, whose maiden name was Marie Madeleine Aubertin. Then for the first time, in the beginning of 1757, he added to his own name that of Beaumarchais, which he was destined to render so celebrated. The manuscript of

Gudin tells us that this pretty name was borrowed from a *very small fief* belonging to young Caron's wife. I do not know exactly where this very small *fief* was situate; I am ignorant whether it was a *fief servant*, or a *fief de haubert*, or simply a *fief* of the imagination: it is, however, certain that this event supplied the judge Goëzman with the only tolerable piece of pleasantry, which his "Memorials against Beaumarchais" contain, where he says: "M. Caron borrowed the name of Beaumarchais from one of his wives, and lent it to one of his sisters."

Although he called himself Monsieur de Beaumarchais, the young controller was not yet a noble: his little office did not cost enough to confer a title of nobility on the holder. It was not until five years afterwards, in 1761, when he had given 85,000 francs for the very noble and very useless office of secretary to the king, that he acquired the right to bear the name of his *fief*, and to make, in 1773, the following remarkable reply to the Councillor Goëzman, who though a noble of very recent origin, was taunting him with being a plebeian: "I reserve for consultation the point whether I have not a right to complain of your searching into my family archives, and reminding people of my origin, which had been almost forgotten. Are you aware that I can already prove twenty years of nobility, and that this title of nobility is really my own, on good parchment, sealed with the grand seal of

yellow wax? that it is not like that of a great many persons, uncertain, and to be taken on trust, and that no one would dare to deny my right to it—*for I have the receipt!*" This sarcasm, which is thoroughly in the style of Beaumarchais, tells us more, with its comic insolence, than hosts of books could do of the degradation of the aristocratic principle in France at the approach of the revolution.

The comfortable circumstances for which Beaumarchais was indebted to his first marriage did not last long; in less than a year afterwards he lost his wife, who died on the 29th September, 1757, having been carried off very rapidly by typhus fever. This coincidence of the death of an infirm old man being followed by that of a woman of thirty-one, who had long been suffering from a disease of the lungs, and who was married to a young man of twenty-five, for whom she had conceived a violent passion; this coincidence was in itself, physiologically speaking, by no means an extraordinary one, and accordingly, in the first instance, no one noticed it. It was not until a later period, when the position of Beaumarchais had become sufficiently brilliant to excite envy, that the atrocious rumours of poisoning, so common in the eighteenth century, were circulated against him. When, by a deplorable fatality, after also losing his second wife, he found himself engaged in a contest with adversaries who had no respect for anything,

these abominable calumnies assumed such a consistency, that he had to undergo the pain of defending himself publicly from them, by appealing to the four physicians who had attended his first wife, and the five who had attended his second, and to prove that the death of each of them, so far from enriching him, had left him without a farthing. The unpublished documents which I have before me fully confirm this assertion.

Thus, to speak of his first marriage only, the author of the memorials against Goëzman expresses himself as follows: "Owing to my not having deposited my marriage contract, the death of my first wife left me penniless in the strict sense of the word, overwhelmed with debts, with certain claims none of which I chose to follow up, in order to avoid having to go to law with relatives, of whom up to that period I could speak only in the highest terms." This delay with regard to the registration of the contract is mentioned at the end of the contract itself; and the fact proves that young Beaumarchais thought so little of the probabilities of his wife dying, that he had not even taken the trouble to insure his own interests in case of her demise. Other documents prove that he gave back his wife's property, partly to the relatives of her first husband, and partly to her own brothers, who, for sixteen years after her death, remained on very good terms with their sister's husband.

This good understanding was not brought to an end until 1773, at a period when the position of Beaumarchais, who was surrounded by enemies and engaged in ruinous law proceedings, seemed to invite all evil-minded persons to the destruction of his fortune: it was then that one of the relatives of his first wife urged the others to combine against him and to declare themselves his creditors, whereas they were in point of fact his debtors, he having paid them more than their share when liquidating their claims upon his wife's property. After a series of law suits, which lasted several years, a final judgment declared them to be in his debt: then they began to write letters of supplication to Beaumarchais, and, although they had probably helped to blacken his reputation, faithful to his easy forgiving nature, he made them a present of the debt. The above is the exact truth of the matter. As to the other points, it will be sufficient, in order to defend the author of the "Marriage of Figaro" from the infamous calumnies which will be found, in the course of this narrative, to have been directed against him, to show how he lived in the privacy of his family: it will be acknowledged at once, that such a man, as Voltaire said, could not be a poisoner, and the only thing left for our astonishment will be, that such perfidious and cruel attacks did not have the effect of altering the kindness and gaiety of his natural disposition.

Thus, in beginning the world, Beaumarchais received from fate that mixture of good and bad fortune which was to characterize his whole career, and to keep his temper and wit continually on the stretch. The death of his first wife threw him back into a state of poverty, but he had kept his trifling appointment at the court; this gave him a footing there, and soon presented him with an opportunity of gaining all, and even more than, he had lost.

The reader has not forgotten that, from his youth, he had had a passion for music; he sang with taste, and was a good performer on the flûte and harp. This latter instrument, which was then but little known in France,* was beginning to be much in vogue. Beaumarchais gave himself up to the study of the harp; he even introduced an improvement in the arrangement of the pedals, as he had previously improved the mechanism of the watch. The reputation which he had obtained as a harpist, in several drawing rooms at the court and in the city, soon reached the ears of "Mesdames de France," the daughters of Louis XV. These four sisters, whose retired mode of life and pious habits formed a happy contrast with the latter

* In Diderot's letters to Mademoiselle Voland, dated 1760, we read the following:—"I had been invited last week, by Count Oginski, to hear him play the harp. *I was not acquainted with this instrument;* it must be one of the first invented by man. I like the harp, but still it is less pathetic than the mandore."

years of their father's reign,* sought to relieve the monotony of their existence by devoting themselves to a variety of studies. We read, in the Memoirs of Madame Campan, that the study of languages, mathematics, and even watchmaking, occupied their leisure hours in succession. They were especially fond of music: Madame Adelaide, for instance, played every instrument, from the horn to the Jew's harp. The reader will remember that Beaumarchais had already had occasion to make a clock of a new description for Madame Victoire. When the princesses heard that the young watchmaker, who had become one of the controllers of the king's household, was remarkable for his talent on the harp, they desired to hear him. He continued to make himself both agreeable and useful: they expressed a wish to take lessons from him, but it was long before he became the organizer of, and principal performer at, a family concert which the princesses gave every week, and which was generally honoured with the presence of the King, the Dauphin, and the Queen Maria Leczinska, and to which only a very few persons were admitted.

We need hardly say, that in this august society, where not only the dignity of supreme rank, but also

* It is well known by what vulgar nicknames Louis XV. used to call his daughters in private life. He had named Mme. Victoire *Coche*, Mme. Adelaide *Loque*, Mme. Sophie *Graille*, and Mme. Louise *Chiffe*.

the purest virtue were represented by the queen and princesses, the young artist threw aside the vapourish and affected airs which, judging from Gudin's sketch, he must have possessed to a considerable extent. If he was a little conceited, he was intelligent to a much greater extent; and, to conform to circumstances, to adapt himself to the dispositions of those whom he wished to please, was always one of his talents. Having left a shop to enter suddenly upon so lofty a sphere, he was obliged to be constantly on his guard; for his position was delicate, perplexing, and sufficiently enviable to produce those bitter jealousies which are only found in courts and behind the scenes—in two kinds of theatres, each of which has the effect of exciting the bad passions of the human heart in the highest degree. He was neither a music-master, nor a servant, nor a noble; and he gave lessons to the princesses without receiving any payment in return: he either composed or purchased all the music they played: he was allowed to give evidence, not only of his talent, but also of his wit, in the private parties of the royal family, in which the principal object was to procure relief from the wearisomeness of etiquette, and in which the young and agreeable commoner could eclipse nobles of the highest descent. One day Louis XV., being anxious to hear him play the harp, offered him his own arm-chair, and forced him to sit down in it in spite of his refusals. On another occa-

sion the dauphin, with whose austere disposition Beaumarchais was acquainted, and to whom he accordingly addressed remarks, which princes of that period were not accustomed to hear, said of him, "He is the only man who speaks the truth to me." This was quite enough to set all the men who were suffering from wounded vanity against a musician who had attained so high a position, and who a few years previously had been seen coming, to court with watches to sell. Let us add, that this young Beaumarchais, who was respectful, yielding, and obliging, to those in whose good intentions he had confidence, was never silent before his declared enemies; that he replied with refined satire to expressions of contempt, which were not always free from coarseness; and that, favoured by all the attractions of youth, good looks, intelligence, and talent, he met even at Versailles with ladies who were not blinded by their aristocratic prejudices: finally, let it be remembered that modesty was not his forte, and it will be understood how at a very early period there was formed against him, what La Harpe calls very properly, a sort of secret and inveterate hatred, which aimed at nothing else than his utter ruin. First of all, he had to put up with all sorts of annoyances; traps were laid in order to make him commit himself; he was the subject of impertinent remarks, to meet which he had need of all his energy

and presence of mind. The story of the watch is well known. A courtier, who had boasted that he would disconcert the protégé of "Mesdames de France," met him in the midst of a numerous group, just as he was coming out of the princesses' apartment arrayed in his court suit, and said, as he handed him a very fine watch: "Sir, as you understand watchmaking, I wish you would have the kindness to examine my watch; it is out of order." "Sir," replied Beaumarchais calmly, "since I have ceased to practise the art, I have become very inexpert." "Oh sir, do not refuse me the favour I ask." "Very well; but I give you notice that I have become very awkward." Then, taking the watch, he opened it, raised it in the air, and pretending to examine it let it fall to the ground. Upon which he made a low bow to the proprietor of the watch, saying, "I had warned you, sir, of my extreme awkwardness." He then walked away, leaving the nobleman to pick up the remains of his watch.

On another occasion, some one told Beaumarchais that the princesses had been informed that he lived on the worst terms with his father, and that they were very much displeased with him. Instead of refuting this calumny in a direct manner, he returned to Paris, and under the pretext of showing his father the château of Versailles, brought him back with him, took him everywhere, and made a point of meeting

the princesses several times while he was thus occupied. In the evening he presented himself to the princesses, leaving his father in the ante-chamber. He was received very coolly; however, one of them asked him, from curiosity, with whom he had been walking about all day. "With my father," replied the young man. The princesses were astonished. An explanation naturally ensued. Beaumarchais solicited for his father the honour of being admitted to their presence, and the old watchmaker himself undertook to sound the praises of his son. The reader need not be told that he did so most satisfactorily.

It is said that Beaumarchais also fell into disgrace with the princesses, owing to an observation which would be made not by a coxcomb but by a fool. It is asserted that, on seeing a full-length portrait of Mademoiselle Adelaide playing the harp, he said before her, "There is only one essential thing absent from this picture, namely, the portrait of the master." This absurd tale happens to have its origin in one of those ill-natured actions to which the young artist was constantly exposed. A fan had been offered to the princesses, on which they were represented at the little concert they were in the habit of giving every week, with all the persons who took part in it, except one; the very person had been intentionally omitted, who in a musical point of view occupied

the first place, that is to say, Beaumarchais. The princesses, when they showed him the fan, which he looked at with a smile, themselves pointed out this ill-natured omission, declaring they did not want a picture in which the painter had disdained to represent their master. The jealousy which was excited by the princesses' protégé was not confined to small calumnies, it extended as far as direct insult. Having been grossly insulted by a courtier, whom the manuscript of Gudin and the unpublished correspondence, mention only as the Chevalier de C——, Beaumarchais was obliged to look upon the affront as a challenge.

"They mounted their horses," says Gudin, "and repaired to the walls of Meudon, beneath which they fought. Beaumarchais had the sad good fortune to plunge his sword into the bosom of his adversary; but when, on drawing it out, he saw the blood issue in a copious stream, and his enemy fall to the ground, he was seized with grief, and thought only of the best means of assisting him.

"He took his own handkerchief, and fastened it as best he could over the wound, so as to stop the blood, and prevent his former adversary from fainting. 'Fly!' said the latter, 'fly, M. de Beaumarchais. You are lost if you are seen—if it becomes known that you have taken my life!' 'You must have help,' replied Beaumarchais; 'I will obtain it for you.' He mounted his horse, hurried to the village of Meudon, asked for a surgeon, pointed out to him the place where the wounded man was lying, showed him the way to the spot, went off at full gallop, and came back to Paris to determine what he should do.

"His first care was to ascertain whether the Chevalier de C—— was still alive. He had been removed to Paris, but his life was despaired of. He heard that the patient refused to give up the name of the man who had wounded him so severely. 'I have what I deserve,' he said. 'To please persons for whom I had no esteem, I insulted an honest man who had never offended me in any way.'

"His relatives and friends could get no answer from him during the eight days through which he lingered. He carried with him to the tomb the name of the person who had deprived him of life, and left him with the eternal regret of having taken away the life of a man who was worthy of every esteem, who had been sufficiently generous to fear to compromise him by the slightest indiscretion.

"'Ah, my young friend,' said Beaumarchais to me one day, when I was joking about some duel which was then the common subject of conversation, 'you do not know what despair a man feels when he finds the hilt of his sword on his enemy's breast.' He then related to me this adventure, which was still afflicting him although many years had elapsed since it had taken place. He never mentioned it without grief, and I should probably never have heard of it if he had not thought it right to make me feel how dangerous it might be to joke about such fatal affairs, the number of which is increased by frivolity much more than by bravery.

"Before the Chevalier died, when it was still uncertain whether he might not let the secret escape him, and whether the family would not thereupon demand vengeance, Beaumarchais sought the intercession of the princesses, to whom he communicated all the details of the unhappy affair. They informed the king of it, and his paternal goodness made him reply, 'Arrange it in such a way, my children, that I may not hear of it.'

"The august princesses took all possible precautions; but

the generosity of the dying man rendered them unnecessary."*

After the somewhat ornate recital of Gudin, I felt it necessary to verify his statement, and discovered the fact and date of the duel noted down by Beaumarchais himself, in his correspondence, with reference to another incident which occurred shortly afterwards, and which will give a better idea than any writing of my own could do of the arrogance of certain noblemen towards this commoner, whom they looked upon as an intruder. Beaumarchais, in the year 1763, happened to be at a ball at Versailles, where the company were playing at cards. A man of rank, named M. de Sablières, with whom he was not acquainted, borrowed thirty-five louis from him. At the end of three weeks, Beaumarchais, hearing nothing of these thirty-five louis, wrote to the nobleman in question, who replied that he would send the thirty-five louis the next day or the day after. Three weeks more elapsed; Beaumarchais wrote a second time, but received no answer. He became impatient, and sent M. de Sablières a third letter, which was as follows:

"After you have broken the written promise which I received from you, sir, I should be wrong to feel astonished at your abstaining from answering my last letter; one is a na-

* It would appear, from Gudin's statement, that the adversaries fought without seconds. I reproduce it exactly as he wrote it.

tural consequence of the other. The fact of your forgetting yourself does not, of course, authorize me to address reproaches to you. You owe me neither politeness nor attention; not having the honour to be one of your friends, what right should I have to expect them from one who fails to execute duties of a more essential nature? This letter, then, is only intended to remind you once more of a debt of thirty-five louis, which was contracted at the house of a mutual friend, with no other security than that of the debtor's honour and the respect which was due by both of us to the house which had brought us together. Another consideration, which is not of less weight, is, that the money you owe me was not won from me on the chance of a card, but that I lent it you out of my own pocket, and perhaps deprived myself thereby of an advantage which I might have been allowed to hope for, if I had chosen to play rather than to oblige you.

"If, unfortunately, this letter does not produce on you the effect which it would produce on me in your place, you will not think me wrong if I place between us a respectable third person, who is the natural judge in matters of this kind.

"I shall wait for your answer until the day after to-morrow. I am happy to have been able to show you, by the moderation of my conduct, the perfect consideration with which I have the honour to be,

"Sir, yours, &c.,

"De Beaumarchais.

"March 29th, 1763."

Now comes the answer of M. de Sablières, the man of rank, writing to the son of the watchmaker, Caron. I reproduce his letter, word for word, with all the faults of orthography and grammar which adorn it.

"Je scois que je suis assés malheureux que de vous devoirs

trente-cinq louis, j'ignore que cela puisse me desonorés quand on a la bonne volontés de les rendre, ma fasson de penssés, Monsieur, est connu, et lorsque je ne serés plus votre débiteur je me fairés connoitre à vous par des terme qui seront diférent des votre. Samedy matin, je vous demenderés un rendevous pour m'acquiter des trente-cinq louis et vous remercier des choses honnettes que vous avés la bontés de vous servir dans votre letre; je fairés en sorte dy repondre le mieux qu'il me sera possible, et je me flatte que dicy à ce tems vous voudrés bien avoir une idée moins desavantageuse. Soyés convincu que cest deux fois vints quatre heure vont me paroitre bien longue; quand au respectable tiers que vous me menassés, jé le respecte, mais je fais on ne peut pas moins de cas des menasse, et je scois encore moins de gré de la modération. Samedy vous aurés vos trente-cinq louis je vous en donne ma parolle, j'ignore si à mon tours je serés assez heureux pour repondre de ma modération, En attendans de metre aquittes de tout ce que je vous dois, je suis, Monsieur, comme vous le désireres, votre très humble et, etc.

"SABLIERES."

"I know that I am unfortunate enough to owe you thirty-five louis;* I am ignorant how that can dishonour me when I have the wish to return them. My way of thinking, sir, is known, and when I am no longer your debtor I shall make you acquainted with me by means very different from those which you employ. I will request you to appoint a rendezvous for Saturday, that I may repay you the thirty-five louis, and thank you for the polite things which you have been kind enough to introduce into your letter. I shall endeavour to reply to them in the best way I can, and I flatter myself that between now and the period of our meet-

* We have, of course, made no attempt to reproduce in our English version the faults by which the original is characterized.—TRANS.

ing you will be kind enough to form a less unfavourable opinion of me. Rest assured that those twice twenty-four hours will appear very long to me; as for the respectable third person with whom you threaten me, I respect him, but I pay the least possible amount of attention to menaces, and appreciate moderation even less. On Saturday you shall have your thirty-five louis: I give you my word for it; I cannot say, in my turn whether I shall be sufficiently fortunate to be sure of my moderation. Until I have paid you all I owe you, I am, sir, as you may wish it, your very humble, &c.

"SABLIERES."

This missive announces no very pacific intentions. Beaumarchais, who had just killed a man at a period when the laws against duelling were still very severe, replied by another letter, in which he commences by denying all intention of wounding the honour of this petulant M. de Sablières, and which he terminates as follows:—

"My letter being now explained, I have the honour to announce to you that I shall wait at home all Saturday morning to see the effect of your third promise. You cannot say, you tell me, whether you will be sufficiently fortunate to be sure of your moderation. From the warmth of your style, it would appear that you have no great command over it when you write; but you may depend upon my not aggravating an evil, of which I am not the author, by losing my own if I can avoid doing so. After this assurance on my part, if it be your intention to go beyond the limits of a civil explanation, and to push things to extremities, which I will not however assume to be the case, from what you say in the

heat of the moment, you will find, sir, that I am as firm in repelling insult as I endeavour to be careful in repressing all that may tend to produce it. I do not fear, then, to assure you again, that I have the honour to be, with all possible consideration, sir,

"Your very humble, &c.

"DE BEAUMARCHAIS."

"*P. S.*—I keep a copy of this letter, as also of the former one, in order that the purity of my intentions may help to justify me in case of misfortune; but I hope to convince you on Saturday, that far from seeking an affair, no one at the present moment ought to use more efforts than myself to avoid such things.

"I cannot explain myself in writing.

"March 31, 1763."

On the copy of this same letter are written in Beaumarchais' hand, the following lines, which explain the postscript and refer to the duel with the Chevalier de C——, of which we have before spoken.

"This took place eight or ten days after my unfortunate affair with the Chevalier de C——, whose imprudence cost him his life; which affair would have ruined me but for the kindness of the princesses, who spoke to the king. M. de Sablières had the postscript of my letter explained to him by Laumur, at whose house I had lent him the thirty-five louis, and the amusing part of it was, that this deprived him of all desire to bring me the money himself."

This detail will be sufficient to explain what a difficult situation was that of a young *parvenu*, who was sufficiently favoured by nature and fortune to

inspire a great deal of jealousy, and too recently emerged from the shop to be received on a footing of equality. It is not astonishing that Beaumarchais' character was formed early in the midst of so many obstacles.

However, the favour in which he stood with the princesses, and which dated from 1759, had long been more enviable in appearance than useful in reality. Although he had no resources beyond the income attached to the office of controller, he was not only obliged to place his time gratuitously at the disposal of the princesses, to say nothing of expenses connected with the concerts, which were often a great burden to him; but he sometimes even found himself obliged to appear in the character of a *grand seigneur*, and to advance money for the purchase of expensive instruments, which was not returned to him with any great haste. Although very desirous to become rich, he was too clever to compromise his credit by receiving pecuniary payment which would have at once placed him in the position of a hired servant. While he was waiting for a favourable opportunity to profit by his position, he at the same time wished to retain the right of saying what he did say at a later period: "I have passed four years in entitling myself to the good wishes of the princesses, by the most assiduous and *disinterested* attention, in connexion with their different kinds of amusement."

Now "Mesdames," like all other women, especially princesses, had the most varied fancies, which it was necessary to gratify at once. The correspondence of Madame du Deffant contains a very curious story, of a box of preserved Orleans quinces, which were desired so impatiently by Madame Victoire, that the king, her father, sent a messenger flying to M. de Choiseul, the prime minister, who forwarded a despatch with equal haste to the Bishop of Orleans, who was waked at three in the morning to receive, to his great alarm, a missive from Louis XV., couched in the following terms:—

"Monsieur l'Evèque d'Orléans, my daughters wish for some *cotignac;* they want very small boxes: send some. If you have none, I beg you will . . . . ."

In this part of the letter there was a drawing of a sedan-chair, and underneath the chair,

'send immediately into your episcopal town to get some; let the boxes be very small; and, Monsieur l'Evèque d'Orléans, may God have you in his holy keeping.

"Louis."

Lower down was this postscript:

"The sedan chair does not mean anything; it was drawn by my daughter on this sheet of paper, which I happened to find near me."

A courier was at once despatched to Orleans. The *cotignac,* says Madame du Deffant, arrived the following day; they no longer cared for it.

It often happened to Beaumarchais to receive commissions which somewhat recall the story of the *cotignac*, with this difference, that the young and needy music-master had not always—like the Bishop of Orleans—a courier at his disposition. Here, for example, is a letter which was addressed to him by Madame Victoire's head lady in waiting.

"Madame Victoire has taken a fancy to-day, sir, to play the tambourine, and desires me to write to you directly, that you may get her one as soon as you possibly can. I hope, sir, your cold has left you, and that you will be able to execute Madame's commission with promptitude.

"I have the honour to be, sir,

"Your very humble servant,

"De Boucheman-Coustillier."

It was necessary to purchase immediately a tambourine fit for the princess's acceptance. The next day a harp was wanted, the day afterwards a flute, and so on. When young Beaumarchais had exhausted his purse, which was at that time very scanty, in paying the tradesmen, and had become rather tired of waiting, he sent his bill with much humility to Madame d'Hoppen, the superindendent of the princess's household, accompanied by the following observations:—

"I beg, madame, that you will have the kindness to observe that I am responsible for the payment of 844 livres, which remain due, as I was unable to advance them myself,

having paid away all the money I had; and I beg you not to forget that I am, in consequence, entirely without a sou.

Besides the	1852	*livres*,
Madame Victoire owes, on a balance of account,	15	„
For a book in morocco, gilt, and bearing her arms,	36	„
And for the copying of the music in the said book,	36	„
Total	1939	*liv.* 10*s.*

which makes 80 *louis* and 19 *livres* 10*s.*

"I do not reckon all the coaches I have had to take in going to the different workmen, nearly all of whom live in the suburbs, nor the messages which I have had to send, as I took no note of the expenses, and am not in the habit of doing so with the princesses. Do not forget, I beg, that Madame Sophie* owes me five louis. In hard times one is obliged to collect the smallest sums. You know my respect and regard for you. I shall say no more on the subject."

The impatience with which Beaumarchais waited for the opportunity of profiting by his position with the princesses is then explicable enough. Literature appearing to him an ungrateful profession, he did not wish to give himself up to it until he could regard it only as an amusement. In the meanwhile, however, he wrote a great deal. From the moment of his appearance at court, he seems to have felt the necessity of completing his unfinished education. His papers of the period in question contain a mass of sheets, on which he has jotted down his own ideas mixed up with quotations, borrowed from a number of authors,

* Louis XV.'s third daughter.

on all sorts of subjects. In these quotations I observe a certain predilection for the writers of the sixteenth century, for Montaigne, and above all for Rabelais, whose free, copious, bold style, so prodigal of epithets, comes out sometimes in the "Barber of Seville" and "Marriage of Figaro," appearing occasionally in combination with the somewhat affected manner of Marivaux.

Although he never had any very remarkable poetic talents, and often mixed with his happiest lines others of a rather common-place description, Beaumarchais had at that time a passion for couplets, and even attempted verses of a higher flight; he wrote, during this period of his youth, a poem of about three hundred verses, on two given rhymes, which, without rising above the mediocre, appears to have been composed with much facility.* These first attempts of Beaumarchais do not give evidence of much original talent. His vocation for poetry and literature does not appear as yet to have been very marked. He appears to have been more struck with the necessity of making his way, and getting an income and a carriage, than with that of cultivating the Muses. On this subject he has the same opinions as his patron Voltaire, who says, somewhere or other: "I had seen

* A satire against optimism. As Beaumarchais' first literary production, it possesses a certain interest, and we have, therefore, given it almost complete in the Appendix, document No. 1.

so many men of letters who were needy and despised, that I had long determined not to increase their number; in France, you must either be the anvil or the hammer—I was born an anvil." . . . Every one knows how Voltaire became a hammer: a rich contractor, Paris Du Verney, gave him a considerable interest in the supplies to be furnished to the army during the war of 1741. The products of this first operation, judiciously invested in commerce, at last brought the patriarch of Ferney an income of 130,000 livres.* It was fated that the very man who had enriched Voltaire should also lay the foundation of Beaumarchais' fortune.

* About £5200.

CHAPTER IV.

BEAUMARCHAIS AND PARIS DU VERNEY.—THE GRAND RANGERSHIP OF RIVERS AND FORESTS.—BEAUMARCHAIS LIEUTENANT-GENERAL OF PRESERVES.

PARIS DU VERNEY was the third of the four brothers Paris, the celebrated financiers of the 18th century, who from the most humble origin (they were the sons of an innkeeper at Moras, in Dauphiné) had raised themselves to the most brilliant position. Du Verney, the most distinguished of the four brothers,* took an active part during more than fifty years in all the great affairs of administration and finance. Voltaire, who had excellent reasons for admiring him, sometimes speaks of him in his works as a man of high genius. He was a man of talent and influence, who had contrived to maintain his position with Madame de Prie as he had done with Madame de Pompadour.

"It is well known," writes Madame de Tencin to the Duke

* The richest was the fourth, Paris Montmartel, the court banker, who left an immense fortune, which was dissipated by his son, the extravagant Marquis de Brunoy.

of Richelieu, in 1743, "that the Paris family are no unimportant personages. They have a great many friends, all sorts of secret influences, and plenty of money to work them with. After that, only judge to what extent they are capable of benefiting or injuring people."

Madame du Hausset, in her interesting Memoirs on Madame de Pompadour, speaks in the following terms of the influence of Du Verney:—

"M. du Verney was Madame's confidential man in all that concerned the war; a subject he was said to understand thoroughly, although he was not a military man. Old Marshal de Noailles used to speak of him contemptuously as the General of the Flour-bags; but Marshal Saxe informed Madame, one day, that Du Verney knew more about war than this old general. Du Verney came one day to Madame de Pompadour's, where he met the king, the minister of war, and two marshals, and gave the plan of a campaign, which was generally applauded. It was he who procured the appointment of the Duke de Richelieu to the army in the place of Marshal d'Estrées."

If Du Verney was indeed the promoter of this appointment, there is no need to compliment him upon it, for Richelieu only signalized himself by his pillage in Hanover, and brought to a disastrous termination the campaign which had been commenced so brilliantly by the victory of Hastenbeck, due to Marshal d'Estrées. But the influence of Du Verney on Madame de Pompadour had sometimes

more fortunate results. Desirous of connecting his name with a useful institution, he induced the king's mistress to give her support to the project of a military school for the education of young officers. Du Verney's plan raised a great outcry. Madame de Pompadour was however decided, and, thanks to her, the military school was founded by an edict of January 1751; so that our young sub-lieutenants, without perhaps being aware of it, are indebted for the school which preceded and produced the present Ecole Militaire to the alliance of a court beauty and an old financier.

Appointed director of the school, with the title of *intendant*, Du Verney began first of all to build the vast edifice which exists at present in the Champ de Mars. While this edifice was being constructed, the disasters of the seven years' war had diminished in a notable manner the influence of Madame de Pompadour; and the Ecole Militaire, being considered as a work of hers, was on that account looked upon with an unfavourable eye by the royal family and by the ministers themselves. In 1760, at the end of nine years, the building was still unfinished; a certain number of young men had been collected there, but the institution was failing for want of support. This state of things was the despair of old Du Verney, who had centered all his pride in this establishment, and whose active, restless, imperious disposition is suffi-

ciently represented in this *quatrain*, which was published after his death:

"Here lies a worthy citizen, whose joy
Lay in tormenting all in his employ.
May God accord him—now he's in the grave—
That rest he living neither took nor gave."

Du Verney was constantly then at court, labouring without cessation on behalf of the military school, and soliciting the king in vain to visit it in state, which would have given a sort of *prestige*. Coldly received by the dauphin, the queen, and the princesses, he could not, as the friend of Madame de Pompadour, obtain from the nonchalance of Louis XV. the visit which he so much desired, when the idea struck him, in his despair, of having recourse to the young harpist, who appeared to be so assiduous in his attendance on the princesses, and who directed their concert every week. Beaumarchais understood at once the advantage he might derive from rendering an important service to a clever, rich old financier, who had still a number of affairs in hand, and who was capable of bringing him both wealth and advancement. But how could a musician without importance hope to obtain from the king what had already been refused to solicitations of much more influence than his own? Beaumarchais went to work, like a man who had a genius for dramatic intrigue and a knowledge of the human heart.

We have shown that, while he was giving his time and attention to the princesses, he never asked for any thing in return. He thought that if he was fortunate enough to persuade them in the first instance to pay a visit to the Ecole Militaire, the curiosity of the king would perhaps be excited by the narrative of what they had seen, and would lead him to do that which he would never have been prompted to do by justice. He accordingly represented to the princesses not only the equitable side of the question, but also the immense interest which he himself had in obtaining this favour for a man who might be of great use to him. The princesses consented to visit the Ecole Militaire, and Beaumarchais was granted the honour of accompanying them. The director received them with great splendour; they did not conceal from him the great interest they took in their young *protégé*, and some days afterwards Louis XV., urged by his daughters, visited it himself, and thus gratified the wishes of old Du Verney.*

* La Harpe and Gudin represent this service as having been rendered by Beaumarchais to Du Verney in consequence of a previous intimacy; this is an error; the intimacy grew out of the service itself. This is proved by the following passage from one of Beaumarchais' unpublished letters:—"In 1760, M. Du Verney, in despair at having for nine years tried every means to induce the royal family to pay a visit to the Military School, which was looked upon as the work of Madame de Pompadour, *wished to make my acquaintance;* he offered me his friendship, assistance, and influence, if I had

From this moment the financier—grateful for Beaumarchais' good services and delighted to find a person who could assist him as an intermediary in his intercourse with the court, resolved to make the young man's fortune. He began by giving him a share in one of his speculations to the amount of 60,000 francs, on which he paid him interest at the rate of ten per cent.; after this he gave him an interest in various other affairs. "He initiated me," says Beaumarchais, "into the secrets of finance, of which, as every one knows, he was a consummate master. I commenced making my fortune under his direction; by his advice I undertook several speculations, in some of which he assisted me with his money or his name, in all with his advice." It was, in fact, under the influence of this able master that the son of Caron, the watchmaker, acquired that taste for speculation which never afterwards forsook him, which contributed not a little to harass his existence, and which, joined to an equally ardent taste for the pleasures of the intellect and imagination, formed the peculiar features of his character.

Soon afterwards, in order to get on more rapidly, he considered it necessary to acquire letters of nobility, by purchasing what was then called a *savonette à vilain*;* that is to say, the title of king's secretary.

enough influence myself to succeed in doing that which every one else had been attempting in vain for nine years."

* Literally—*soap for the snob*.—TRANS.

But there was at first an obstacle in the way of this: old M. Caron continued his trade of watchmaking, which was enough to compromise the success of the candidate. A letter from Beaumarchais to his father proves that even at that time he did not deceive himself as to the moral value of this kind of ennoblement.

"If I were at liberty," he writes to his father, "to say what new year's gift I should like to receive from you, I should wish above all that you would remember your promise of such long standing, to change the inscription above your shop-front. An affair which I am about to conclude will probably be met by this difficulty alone, that you are in trade—a fact of which you inform the public in an announcement which admits of no reply. I cannot think that you will refuse me a favour, which can make no difference to you, and which will make a great difference in my prospects, owing to the foolish manner in which matters are viewed in this country. Not being able to alter the prejudice, I am obliged to submit to it, as there is no other channel open to the advancement which I desire for our happiness, and for that of all the family. I have the honour to be, with the most profound respect, Monsieur and honoured father,

"Your very humble, &c.,

"De Beaumarchais.

"Versailles, January 2, 1761."

Old M. Caron decided to give up watchmaking altogether, so as not to interfere with the career of his son, and the patent of king's secretary was obtained by Beaumarchais, on the 8th of December, 1761.

This new position contributed not a little to increase the number of his enemies; and the jealous feelings which were excited by his rapid fortune soon exhibited itself, from an occurrence which was the great misfortune of this first period of his life.

One of the grand rangerships of the rivers and forests became vacant by the death of the holder. The grand rangerships of the rivers and forests were divided into eighteen departments for the whole of France. The place was important, lucrative, and cost 500,000 livres.

Du Verney, who was becoming more and more attached to his young friend, lent him the sum necessary to buy it, promising to provide him with the means of repaying the money by contracts for the army, the *bouteille de l'encre* of the ancient *régime*. The money was deposited with a notary: it only remained necessary to obtain the consent of the king: if Beaumarchais had obtained it, the course of his life would probably have been changed, and already the princesses had the assurance of the controller-general that the desired assent would be given. Their *protégé* thought he was sure of success, but he had reckoned without his enemies.

On hearing that the watchmaker was about to become their colleague, some of the grand masters of the waters and forests became indignant, and appealed to the others; a collective petition was addressed to

the controller-general, in which these gentlemen threatened to resign. I will in the first place give the note presented by the princesses in Beaumarchais' name to the king, which at once puts us in possession of the facts of the case:—

"TO THE KING.

"Beaumarchais, grandson of an engineer, nephew on the father's side of a captain of grenadiers, who died a chevalier of St. Louis, for the last seven years controller of the king's household, requests his Majesty's permission to hold the office of grand master of the waters and forests, which he has purchased for 500,000 francs on the promise of the controller-general, given to Mesdames (the princesses) that he should have this place when he or his father had obtained the appointment of king's secretary. He himself obtained that appointment: he is ready to give the appointment up to his father if required. There is no personal objection to be made to him, but exception is taken to his father as carrying on the trade of watchmaker, who left it altogether six years since:* it is, moreover, said that he was unable to get accepted as his Majesty's major-domo. To that Beaumarchais replies that several of the present grand-masters, and many of those who have retired, are of lower origin and extraction than himself: he appears as king's secretary, and consequently as a noble: if he was not accepted as his Majesty's major-domo, it was in consequence of a new regulation which requires the applicant to be noble, and at that time he had not been appointed king's secretary.

* This statement, which was written in 1762, is contradicted by the preceding letter of January 1761. It was only a year since old M. Caron had quite given up trade; but a petitioner is not required to be minutely accurate.

"The opposition of some of the grand masters, who assume to speak in the name of the *corps* (and whose hatred probably arises from envy) ought to give way before the promise of the controller-general, the intervention of Mesdames, and the consideration that a refusal brings dishonour and ruin to an honest man."

M. de la Chataigneraie, the queen's equerry, also wrote to Paris du Verney, in the name of the princesses, to urge him to use his influence with the controller-general, in favour of Beaumarchais. Du Verney's answer, which was addressed directly to the princesses, in the form of a memorandum, will give an idea of the activity of the struggle and the interest with which the young candidate inspired the princesses:—

"MEMORANDUM FOR FRIDAY, JANUARY 8, 1762, FOR MESDAMES DE FRANCE.

"Du Verney has been unable to see M. Bertin,* who has gone to Versailles to-day, without giving an answer to the request which had been made for an interview, but he has seen M. De Beaumont,† and has made the strongest representations to him on the subject of the injustice which it is contemplated to inflict on M. de Beaumarchais. He has convinced him that they cannot avoid receiving the young man. M. de Beaumont told him that M. Bertin, when he left him, intended speaking to the king about the matter, but that he had not made up his mind either against or in favour of the young man. Du Verney thinks that if M. Bertin pre-

* Controller-General of the Finances.

† M. Moreau de Beaumont, Intendant of the Finances under whose jurisdiction were the waters and forests.

disposes the king not to give his consent, it will be difficult to avoid the consequences: he thinks that Mesdames should see the minister before the conversation, and ask him to do one of two things: either to set the matter before the king in an advantageous manner, so that he may be ordered to proceed in spite of the unjust objection of the grand masters, or not to speak of it as yet, so that Du Verney may have time to have a conversation with him on his return, similar to that which he has held with M. de Beaumont. However, if Mesdames have given the memorial to the king, and intimated to him that they were interested in its success, and that all honest persons hope the unfortunate young man will not be the victim of envy and calumny, Du Verney thinks the controller-general can have no reason for wishing to ruin M. de Beaumarchais, and a thousand for serving him, since Mesdames honour him with their protection. Du Verney entreats Mesdames to be kind enough to let him know what has been done, that he may act accordingly."

The portrait which Du Verney gives us elsewhere of young Beaumarchais is one which rather clashes with the notion that is generally formed of the author of the "Marriage of Figaro." "Since I have known him," he writes to the minister, "and he has been intimate with me, everything has shown that he is an upright young man, whose noble mind, excellent heart, and polished wit, merit the love and esteem of all honest persons; with the experience of misfortune, and the teachings of the opposition he has met with, he will owe his advancement, if he obtain it, to his good qualities alone."

Beaumarchais, in his turn, after exhausting every

mode of application, defends himself against the persecution of the grand masters in a sufficiently comic style; since, instead of proving that he himself is noble, he now confines himself to proving that his adversaries are not so.

"Neither my inclination," he writes to the minister, "nor my principles, allow me to play the odious part of informer, still less to attempt to vilify persons whose associate I am anxious to become; but, I think that without offending delicacy, I may use the same arms against my adversaries with which they are endeavouring to overcome me.

"The grand masters have never allowed their memorial to be communicated, which is not fair fighting, and proves that they are afraid I may answer them with advantage; but I am told their objection is that my father was an artist, and that, however celebrated a man may be in his art, such a condition is incompatible with the honours of the grand rangership.

"In reply, I will pass in review the family and previous position of several of the grand masters, about whom very accurate particulars have been supplied to me.

"1. The name of M. d'Arbonnes, grand master of Orleans, and one of my warmest antagonists, is Hervé, and he is the son of Hervé the *hairdresser*. I can mention ten living persons to whom this Hervé has sold wigs, and placed them on their heads; I am told in answer to this, that Hervé was a dealer in hair. What a distinction! It is ridiculous in the spirit, and false in the letter; for no one can sell hair in Paris without being received as a hairdresser, or otherwise must sell it surreptitiously: but he was a hairdresser. However, Hervé d'Arbonnes was received as grand master, *without opposition*, although during his youth he had perhaps followed his father's failing for the profession in question.

"2. The name of M. de Marizy, who was appointed grand master of Burgundy, five or six years since, is Legrand, and he is the son of Legrand the *wool-winder* in the Faubourg St. Marceau, who afterwards built a little shop for the sale of blankets, near the market of St. Laurent, where he made some money. His son married the daughter of La Fontaine-Sellier, took the name of Marizy, and was received as grand master *without opposition.*

"3. M. Tellès, grand master of Châlons, is the son of a Jew, named Tellès-Dacosta, who was originally a second-hand jeweller, and who afterwards made his fortune, through MM. Paris; he was received *without opposition*, and afterwards excluded, as I am told, from the assemblies, because he resumed his father's trade, about which matter I know nothing.

"4. M. Duvaucel, grand master of Paris, is the son of a Duvaucel, who was the son of a button-maker; he was afterwards shopman at his brother's in the little Rue aux Fers, then a partner in his brother's business, and finally, master of the shop. M. Duvaucel met with *no obstacle to his recepton.*"

Beaumarchais, as may be seen, had to contend with aristocrats whose genealogy was not more formidable than his own, but who for that very reason were only the more inveterate against a candidate whom they could not forgive, either for his youth, his rapid advancement, his wit, or his success in society. In spite of his efforts, in spite of the patronage of the princesses, and the support of Paris du Verney, he could not succeed in overcoming the open opposition of the grand masters; the minister sided with them, and the consent of the king was not given.

This painful check at the commencement of an administrative career, which might have been brilliant, went to Beaumarchais' heart; the obstacles which proceeded from his humble origin, became more and more numerous, and it is not astonishing that his genius exhibited a democratic and subversive tone up to the period of the Revolution. However, the true aristocracy were less hostile to him than the counterfeit patricians who were taking possession of everything in the latter days of the ancient *régime*. The circumstance which proves that personal antipathy was the only motive of the opposition of the grand masters, and that no important reason rendered Beaumarchais unworthy of taking his place among them is that some months afterwards he was able to purchase, receive, and perform the duties of an office, which was much less lucrative, it is true, than the other one, but far more aristocratic than the former one; an office which invested him with judicial functions, and which gave him precedence over persons of a much loftier birth than himself. To console and avenge himself for not having been able to procure admittance into the order of the grand rangers of the waters and forests, he purchased the office of *Lieutenant-general of the Preserves in the Bailliwick, and Captainry of the Warren of the Louvre*: his nomination was presented for the king's consent by the Duke de La

Vallière,* captain-general of the preserves, whose chief officer Beaumarchais now became, having beneath him the Count of Rochechouart, and the Count of Marcouville, who were merely lieutenants of the preserves. Now, it is evident that if at this period there had been anything serious to allege against the honour of Beaumarchais, the three persons whom I have just named would never have accepted him without opposition; one as his representative, the other two as their superior, in the performance of functions of a judicial character — for such was the nature of the semi-feudal office which Beaumarchais held, and which he filled with the most scrupulous care for a period of twenty-two years.

We may here explain briefly in what this office consisted, in the exercise of which it is difficult to imagine the author of the "Marriage of Figaro," without a laugh. Captainry was the name given to a district over which the king reserved the exclusive right of sporting. The one which bore the name of the Warren of the Louvre, extended to a radius of twelve or fifteen leagues round Paris. In order to maintain the exclusive right of the king, and to decide upon all cases in which it appeared to be infringed upon, there was a special tribunal, the tribunal of the Warren of the Louvre, called the "Tribunal for the Conservation of *the King's Pleasures*," which

* Grand nephew of the celebrated Duchess of that name.

arraigned and punished, on the accusation of the officers and keepers of the Captainry, every individual who acted in contravention of the decrees, destined to guard the royal privilege. These decrees were very numerous, and very vexatious to the landowner, who could neither kill the game, nor construct a new paling, nor make any alterations in his ground, without obtaining an authorisation to do so. Accordingly, the suppression of the Captainries in 1789 was one of the most popular measures passed by the Constituent Assembly. The tribunal in question held its sittings at the Louvre, and was presided over by the Duke de la Vallière, Captain-general, or in his absence, that is to say, almost always, by Lieutenant-general Beaumarchais, who came there every week, and sat down in a long robe on the *fleurs de lis* to judge gravely not "*les pâles humains*" but "*les pâles lapins.*" The fact is, that he condemned "pallid men" to fine or imprisonment quickly enough, only it was about some question of rabbits that he did so.

The following is an extract from one of the numerous sentences which Beaumarchais passed every week, and which were posted up throughout the district of the Captainry. The reader may wish to see the multiform individual who is the subject of this work, in the somewhat novel character of a serious Bridoison.*

* Some of our readers may be unaware that *Bridoison* is the judge

"On the part of the King, and Monseigneur the Duke de la Vallière, Peer and Grand-falconer of France, &c., or his Lieutenant-general;

SENTENCE,

Which condemns the said Ragondet, farmer, to a fine of one hundred livres, for not having conformed to the terms of Article 24 of the Royal decree of 1669, and to pull down the shed and outer walls mentioned in the report of the 24th of the present month of July."

The judgment concludes as follows:—

"Done and given by *Messire* Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais, Equerry, and King's Counsellor, Lieutenant-general of the Bailiwick, and Captainry of the Warren of the Louvre, and of the Grand Venery of France, holding his sittings in the audience chamber, situate in the Château of the Louvre, this Thursday the 31st July 1766.

"Collated: DEBRET. Signed: DEVITRY, Registrar-in-Chief."

In 1773, after having exercised these superb functions for ten years, Messire Caron de Beaumarchais happened to get sent by a *lettre de cachet* to For-l'-Evèque, whereupon it was determined to dispute his title to the lieutenant-generalship. He at once, from the depth of his prison, asserted his claim in a letter to the Duke de la Vallière, in which he evinces

who appears in the "Marriage of Figaro;" a species of *Dogberry*, suggested, as far at least as regards the name, by the *Bridoison* (Justice Bridlegoose) of Rabelais.—TRANS.

all the pride and haughtiness of a baron of the middle ages.

"Monsieur le Duc,—Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais, Lieutenant-general, at the seat of your Captainry, has the honour to represent to you, that as his detention by order of the king does not deprive him of his functions in the state, he has been much surprised to learn that, without attending to the order concerning the captainry, dated May 17, 1754, which sets forth that every officer who does not produce a valid excuse for not finding himself at the reception of a new officer, shall be deprived of his *droit de bougies*,* the registrar of the captainry has not only made a distribution of bougies, in which all mention of the name and *droit de bougies* of your petitioner were suppressed by the most culpable infringement of the said order—since there can be no more valid excuse for being absent from the tribunal on a reception day, than that of having had the misfortune to be arrested by order of the king — but has even made over to another officer the right to distribute and sign orders for the delivery of the said bougies, which from all time have belonged to the lieutenant-general of your seat.

"The punctuality and zeal with which your petitioner has always fulfilled the duties of his office up to the present time, make him hope, M. le Duc, that you will be pleased to maintain him in all the privileges of the said office, against every attempt which may be made to his disadvantage. When M. de Schomberg was at the Bastille, the king thought fit that he should continue his duties in connection with the Swiss whom he had the honour to command. The same

* At the tribunal of the warren of the Louvre: this was the name given to a pecuniary allowance which was granted to every member who was present on certain official occasions.

thing happened to M. le Duc du Maine.* Your petitioner is perhaps the least worthy of the officers of your captainry, but he has the honour to be the lieutenant-general, and you will certainly not disapprove, M. le Duc, of his endeavouring to prevent the highest office of your captainry from being lowered while in his hands, and his affairs from being interfered with by any other officer to his detriment.

"CARON DE BEAUMARCHAIS."

Beaumarchais had been just able to support his imprisonment at For-l'-Evèque. To him, a nobleman of recent origin, it was what the Bastille was to a Schomberg; but when, in 1785, by a most scandalous abuse of authority, he was imprisoned for five days in a house of correction, the pride of the lieutenant-general of the preserves was wounded, and he magnanimously resigned in the following letter to the Duke de Coigny, who had succeeded the Duke de la Vallière.

"Paris, March 22, 1785.

"Monsieur le Duc,—The insult which I have received, without deserving it, from a hand which I respect so deeply, that I can only grieve in silence until the most convincing proofs of my innocence be placed under the king's eyes; the insult I say which I have received, Monsieur le Duc, having struck me out of the society of men, I have sentenced myself to a perpetual imprisonment at home, and as you, Monsieur le Duc de Coigny, cannot be affected in any way by so strange an event, I have the honour to beg that you will accept the resignation

* The reader sees that Messire Caron de Beaumarchais does not look for his precedents among plebeians. He must have Schombergs, and princes of the blood.

of my functions as your lieutenant-general. This change in my position will in no way alter the respectful attachment with which I am, Monsieur le Duc, &c.,

"CARON DE BEAUMARCHAIS."

Four years after this last letter, there existed neither captainry nor tribunal of the warren of the Louvre, and "Messire, the *ex*-lieutenant-general," had become simply citizen Beaumarchais.

A person who had lived within his jurisdiction, and who had retained a spite against him on account of some decision on behalf of the latter, in favour of the "conservation of the royal pleasures," got an advocate to write a letter to him upon the subject, which was full of insults and threats, and to which the author of the "Marriage of Figaro" replied like a man who had completely cast off his judicial robes. It is quite in Beaumarchais' natural style.

"September 4, 1790.

"I have received the *very kind* letter of a gentleman who signs *Germain*, or *St. Germain*, and who calls himself the advocate of a M. Merle, on which I congratulate his client. When I was lieutenant-general of the tribunal for the conservation of the king's pleasures, I was condemned to hear all that had to be said by plaintiffs and defendants, and I acted according to my equity, my intelligence, and the text of the law, which I endeavoured to soften as much as possible: but at the present time, when, *thank heaven*, there are no preserves to protect, and no tribunals for protecting them, I am spared the annoyance of having to receive and reply to peti-

tions. Accordingly I beg M. Germain, or St. Germain, the advocate to aim his letters at objects by which my youth may yet profit.

"CARON-BEAUMARCHAIS."

It was in 1790 that Beaumarchais spoke with so much levity of his former functions as lieutenant-general of the preserves. At the period at which we have arrived, that is to say, in 1763, he little thought that the Revolution would abolish the feudal office of which for a time he had been so proud. He used to divide his time between the duties of this office, the functions of controller of the king's household, and of those of king's secretary, without neglecting the three or four industrial enterprises in which he was engaged, and without forgetting his private pleasures, which he never did forget, nor his affection for his family, which throughout life occupied a large place in his thoughts. He had bought a pleasant house in the Rue de Condé, in which he installed his father and his younger sisters, who were unmarried, and where he used to pass all his leisure hours, when a letter from one of his sisters at Madrid determined him to set out for Spain.

CHAPTER V.

BEAUMARCHAIS AND CLAVIJO. — BEAUMARCHAIS AT MADRID.—A BREACH OF PROMISE OF MARRIAGE.—M. DE GRIMALDI.—BEAUMARCHAIS IN THE COMMISSARIAT.—BEAUMARCHAIS' SEGUEDILLAS.—BAUMARCHAIS AT THE CARD-TABLE.—BEAUMARCHAIS AND VOLTAIRE.—THE SPANISH DRAMA.

Beaumarchais' affair with Clavijo in 1764, is sufficiently well known by the graphic narrative of the transaction which he himself published ten years afterwards, in February 1774, in his fourth memorial against Goëzman. It will suffice, therefore, here to verify the principal details of this narrative by means of the private correspondence I have before me.

It will be remembered that two of Beaumarchais' sisters, one of whom had married an architect, had gone to establish themselves at Madrid. A Spanish man of letters, named Joseph Clavijo, had fallen in love with the younger of the two sisters; promises of marriage had been interchanged; and this marriage was to be concluded as soon as the young man, who was without fortune, should obtain an appointment which he was soliciting. The appointment had been obtained and the banns published, when Clavijo sud-

denly refused to perform his promise, thus gravely injuring the domestic tranquillity as well as the reputation of Beaumarchais' sister. It was under these circumstances that the latter arrived in Madrid, where by a combination of energy, coolness, and dexterity, he forced from Clavijo a declaration little honourable to himself, but offering a secure guarantee for the honour of Mademoiselle Caron. Within a short time the Spaniard, terrified at seeing himself exposed to the enmity of so resolute an adversary, solicited a reconciliation with his affianced bride. To this Beaumarchais consented to lend his aid; the reconciliation was satisfactorily effected, when at the very moment that Beaumarchais thought the marriage was about to take place, he learned that Clavijo was secretly plotting against him, and that by accusing him of being engaged in a conspiracy, he had obtained from the government an order for his arrest, and for his expulsion from Madrid. The irritated Beaumarchais hastened to the ministers, penetrated even to the presence of the king, justified himself completely, and revenged himself upon his treacherous foe by obtaining his dismissal from the post he held—that of keeper of the archives—and his ejection from the court.

Such, reduced to its simplest form, is the history of an episode in his life which Beaumarchais has been able to invest with the most lively attraction.

When we read his Memorial, written ten years after the events narrated, we are naturally led to seek to verify its exactitude. In a short notice of Clavijo,* Beaumarchais is accused of calumniating the unfaithful lover of his sister, and of drawing a "hideous portrait" of him. It is very probable that, in order to excite more interest for himself, Beaumarchais may have, in some degree, overcharged his adversary's picture; but beyond the fact that it is an exaggeration to accuse him of having drawn a "hideous portrait,"† it is certain that the chief points of the narrative published in 1774, are in perfect harmony with the private correspondence of 1764. Thus the authenticity of Clavijo's first declaration, in which he avows "having broken a promise of honour without pretext and without excuse," and of which avowal his subsequent conduct much increases the gravity, is fully confirmed by the family documents. This confession of Clavijo's gave rise, indeed, to the follow-

* Published in the "Biographie Universelle."

† This Joseph Clavijo, who afterwards became a writer of distinction, was unlucky enough to have to exist for years after an event he had almost forgotten, stigmatised with the atrocious character drawn of him by Beaumarchais. During his own lifetime he saw himself gibbeted on the public stage by Göthe as a melo-dramatic villain; but villany in love does not always injure a man; and that of Clavijo did not prevent him obtaining considerable success at Madrid, where he edited the "Historical and Political Mercury," translated Buffon into Spanish, and where he died in 1806, Vice-Director of the Museum of Natural History.

ing letter, written by old M. Caron to his son at Madrid, in which, beneath the outer casing of the old watchmaker, we find traces of the former dragoon :—

"Paris, June 5, 1764.

"What delight it affords me, my dear Beaumarchais, to be blessed with a son whose actions so gloriously crown the end of my career. I can see at a glance how beneficial the generous action you have done will be to the honour of my dear Lisette. What a splendid marriage present for her, my friend, will be this same declaration of *Clavico's*.* If we may judge of the cause by the effect, he must have been terribly frightened. Assuredly, I myself would not, for the empire of Mahom, with that of Trebisonde into the bargain, have written and signed such a document; it covers you with glory and him with shame. By the same post I have received two letters from my charming countess (the Countess of Fuen-Clara), addressed to Julie and myself—so charming, so touching, so full of expressions of tenderness towards me, and of honourable mention of you, that I am sure you would participate in the pleasure I have experienced in their perusal. You have enchanted her. She seems never tired in rejoicing at knowing you—in longing to be of service to you, and so expressing her delight *that all the Spaniards approve of, and praise your behaviour to Clavico.*† She could not be more delighted had she been enabled to call you entirely her own. I entreat you not to

* At this time Mademoiselle Caron's marriage with another person was in contemplation.

† It is plain from this, that if, ten years afterwards, Beaumarchais did paint himself in somewhat flattering colours, the testimony of the Countess of Fuen-Clara, a lady of advanced age, and enjoying great consideration, places it beyond doubt that his conduct had gained him many partisans in Spain.

neglect her. Adieu, my dear Beaumarchais, my honour, my glory, my crown, the joy of my heart. Accept a thousand embraces from the tenderest of fathers and the best of friends.

"CARON."

This letter proves that Beaumarchais does not violate truth, when in his Memorial against Goëzman he represents himself saying to Clavijo, "I am not about here to assume the part of one of those stage brothers who wish their sisters to be married." It was, indeed, not so much to force his sister upon Clavijo, by, as it were, holding a pistol to his head, as to secure a safeguard for her reputation, with a view to her eventual marriage with a Frenchman named Durand, who was established at Madrid. We are led to this conclusion by the following passage from a letter written by Beaumarchais, and dated the 15th of August, 1764, in which we find a corresponding justification of other assertions made in the Memorial published in 1774.

"I found my Spanish sister nearly married to Durand; for in the state of discredit into which the poor child, with her girlish notions, imagined herself to have fallen, the first honest man who offered himself was almost a divinity to her. My arrival having, in some measure, rectified her ideas, and on finding myself disposed, from my own personal views, and also from the advice of my Ambassador, to prefer Clavijo, who I had every right to believe was thoroughly cured of his former aberrations—from all the means he employed to persuade me of the fact—I found it necessary to use, in the first instance, gentle means, in order to sever a bond which hope and habit had cemented on either side."

These details thoroughly harmonise with that part of the Memorial of 1774, in which Beaumarchais represents himself as having been seduced by Clavijo into becoming his advocate with his sister. In other letters he narrates the Spaniard's underhand proceedings, his duplicity, and the vengeance he at length, though with considerable hesitation, inflicted on him.

"This coxcomb Clavijo," he writes, "boasted that he had not yet lost his appointment, and that he was all the while drawing his salary secretly. He talked about it too openly and too often. I heard of it in my turn, and my pity immediately changed into indignation. His post is given away. It now only remains to him either to turn capuchin, or to leave the country. He is completely crushed; yet even now my sentiments of pity towards him return; but this time, alas! they must be fruitless."

A journal of the whole of these transactions had been kept at the actual time of their occurrence by Beaumarchais; this journal, which served as a basis for the narrative published by him ten years afterwards, is not to be found among his papers; but its existence is confirmed by many passages in his correspondence, and especially so by this note written in 1764 to M. Caron, senior, by an abbé to whom the contents of the journal in question had been communicated.

"I have read and re-read, sir, the account sent you from Madrid. I am overjoyed at all it contains; your son appears

in the light of a true hero. I am happy to recognise in him the wittiest of men, the tenderest of brothers; honour, firmness—each quality shines in his proceedings with Clavico. It will delight me to see the issue of an affair which interests me so much. I am exceedingly grateful for your attention; the only claim I have to it lies in the sentiments of esteem and friendship which I entertain for you, and for the whole of your respectable and amiable family, and with which I have the honour to be, &c., &c.

"THE ABBE DE MALESPINE.

"June 3; 1764."

Thus it was no romance, as has been sometimes said, but a true story which inspired the author of the Memorials against Goëzman to write perhaps the best pages that ever proceeded from his pen, and it was indeed fortunate for him to be provoked by an anonymous letter vilifying and calumniating his conduct at Madrid into thus admitting the public to his confidence.

So much for the Clavijo adventure; but this adventure only occupied a month. Commenced at the end of May 1764, it was spoken of no more at the end of June, and Beaumarchais remained more than a year at Madrid: he only left that city at the end of March 1765. What was he doing there? We shall soon learn from his correspondence, and he will there appear in his own proper character, with all the vivacity and variety of his nature.

He had left Paris in order to avenge his sister; but he was not a man to travel so far for a single

object; his intentions were not only to transact business, but a great deal of business. From this point of view Spain, in 1764, presented a new and attractive field of enterprise for imaginative speculators such as Beaumarchais essentially was. He arrived with a head full of projects, and a pocket furnished with 200,000 francs in notes payable to the bearer, which had been entrusted to him by Du Verney, (though it must be added that the latter had forbidden him to make use of them without his express authority,) and which had been given to him to enable him to assume an influential standing with the Spanish ministry. He brought with him, too, numerous letters of recommendation from the court to the Ambassador of France; and he had scarcely arrived before he was launched into that vortex of industrial enterprises, of pleasures, of fêtes, of gallantries, of music, of songs, that seems always to have been his element. In the flower of his youth, in the thirty-second year of his age, all his wit, all his imagination, all his gaiety, all his enthusiasm, all his faculties, in a word, were at their acmé of development. We have here the Almaviva and the Figaro of the "Barber of Seville" blended together, with a touch of Sir Charles Grandison, and withal some shades of character that remind us of the most celebrated speculators of our own times.

"I pursue my business transactions," he writes to his father, "with the obstinacy you know me to possess, but in all

matters between Frenchman and Spaniard I find success very hard; I shall have some fine details to give you when I come back to warm myself at your fire-side.

"I work, I write, I confer, I draw up, I represent, I defend, I oppose: such is my life. The Marquis Grimaldi, the most gallant gentleman that was ever at the head of a ministry is my passion; his manners so frank, so noble, that I cannot help being enchanted with them. Pray keep what information I send you within the bounds of a very narrow circle: do not let it pass beyond the walls of your little retreat. It appears that they are rather pleased here with the manner in which I have been able to throw a light on some somewhat thorny questions;* and I can venture at least to promise you that if I do not succeed in everything I undertake, I shall at least carry away with me from this country the esteem of all with whom I have had to do. Take care of your health, and believe me that my greatest happiness will consist in sharing with you whatever good fortune I may meet with."

In another place Beaumarchais writes:—

"I am in the prime of life. My genius will never have greater vigour; it is my part to work, yours to rest. I shall, perhaps, succeed in enabling you to fulfil your engagements. I do not tell you all now, but rely upon it I do not forget the project which I have thought of so long, that of placing you on an equality with all who surround you; only live carefully, my dear father, do not neglect yourself. The time will come when you will enjoy your old age as you deserve, free from debt, and in the society of your loving children. I am getting your son-in-law appointed paid engineer to the king. He has become very steady, and works like a horse: I urge him on with the spur of ambition, but he goes well enough of his

* *Assez content du* jour *que j'ai répandu sur quelques* questions épineuses.

own accord. If you received any news of me from an inhabitant of Madrid, you would be told that your son was amusing himself here like a king; he spends all his evenings at the house of the Russian Ambassador, or at Lady Rochford's: he dines four times a-week with the commander of the engineers, and drives in a coach drawn by six mules about the environs of Madrid; then he goes to the *sitio real* to see M. de Grimaldi and the other ministers. He takes one of his meals every day at the French Ambassador's, so that these visits are not only charming but also put him to very little expense. All this relates to amusement; but your friends must not conclude that I am neglecting my own business, for no one has ever attended to that but myself. It is in good society, for which I was born, that I find my resources, and when you see the productions of my pen you will perceive that I have not walked but run towards my object."

What, then, were the works which came from Beaumarchais' pen at Madrid? First of all there was a voluminous paper on the concession of the exclusive right to trade with Louisiana to a French company organised on the principle of the India Company, and about which Beaumarchais was memorialising the Spanish ministry. After this came a plan, in virtue of which he asks for the right of supplying all the Spanish colonies with negroes. The idea is singular enough as coming from the author of the little poem against optimism, already alluded to, which contains a vehement denunciation of slavery, and which was written only a year before Beaumarchais' visit to Madrid. It appears that his specula-

tions were not arranged on the same principles as his philosophy.*

The third project which the distinguished traveller prepared at Madrid, between a concert and a dinner, was one for the colonisation of the Sierra Morena; this was followed by different other papers on the advancement of agriculture, manufactures, and commerce in Spain, and finally, a new plan for supplying the Spanish troops with provisions. As this last scheme was much nearer being executed than any of the others, we will leave him to discuss it in his own manner, in an unpublished letter to his father, which is very long, and from which I make long quotations, because in its great diversity it is a living portrait of this speculator, philosopher, and artist, called Beaumarchais.

* Two years afterwards, in 1766, Beaumarchais, who had already forgotten his project for supplying the Spanish colonies with negroes, wrote a letter to the head of the administrative department of the navy in favour of a mulatto, commencing as follows:—"A poor fellow named Ambroise Lucas, whose only crime consists in having a complexion almost as dark as that of the majority of the free inhabitants of Andalusia, with brown hair which curls naturally, large black eyes, and very beautiful teeth, all which is very pardonable, has been put in prison on the requisition of a man who happens to be a little whiter, named M. Chaillou, who had about the same right over the man with the dark complexion which the Ishmaelite dealers acquired over little Joseph, when they purchased him from persons who had no right to sell him; but our religion has sublime principles, which harmonise admirably with the colonial system."

"Madrid, Jan. 28, 1765.

"Monsieur, and dearest Father,—I have received your letter of Jan. 15, in which you express your astonishment at the manner in which your friends received your communication.* But what appears to have struck you with surprise would have seemed to me a natural thing enough. To preserve a good opinion of ourselves, it is only necessary to neglect no portion of what we undertake: to gain the good opinion of others it is necessary to succeed. Success is the only recognised test of the ability of those who speculate. Therefore, if I had been able to stop the words on your lips, I certainly should have objected as much as possible to your communicating my secrets to any one. My plans may be the wisest possible; I might exhibit all the talent and skill imaginable for conducting so important an affair to a happy issue. If some unforeseen event caused my bark to founder even in the harbour, I should expect nothing but a bitter smile from those who would have exalted me to the clouds if I had been favoured by fortune. However, my dear father, you know me. The most comprehensive and lofty projects are no strangers to my mind. It conceives and comprehends with much facility, that which would at once check ordinary and indolent minds. I told you the other day that I had just signed the preliminaries; I am now much more advanced. The hydra of seven heads was a trifle compared with the one of a hundred heads, which I have undertaken to overcome. But at all events, I have now managed to make myself absolute master of the enterprise for supplying *the entire provisions for the whole of the troops of Spain, Majorca, and the garrisons on the coast of Africa*; and those of all persons living at the king's expense. Our

* The father, who had already heard of the project, and who had been asked by his son to keep it a secret, had spoken of it in confidence to some friends who appeared to have doubts of its success.

friend is right in saying that it is the greatest affair in the country. It amounts to more than twenty millions a-year. My company is organised, my officials are appointed. I have four cargoes of corn on the voyage, both from New England and from the south, and if I can untie the last knot, I shall commence altogether on the 1st of March. The persons who are at present engaged in the affair, understand nothing about it, and lost horribly last year: first, because corn was almost beyond price in Spain, while they had not a single correspondent abroad; secondly, because they had undertaken the contract at too small a sum. I have put them out of court, by different means, the combination of which was very difficult; finally, I have succeeded in introducing a spirit of conciliation and peace between the partners, in place of an animosity which was as ruinous to them as their mode of conducting business. They are quite out of the matter. What I have to do now, is to get my own conditions accepted by the minister, who invites me to open the ball, but finds the music rather dear. I can diminish nothing in my just demands . . . . . If my conditions be accepted, I engage to pay the king back about 4,000,000 of reals, which he had previously advanced on the affair; provided always his Majesty consents to wait for the money until the last year of the contract. One of the most positive articles of the agreement is the payment, which is assured to me on the 13th of every month, of 1,800,000 reals, which I am to receive from the royal treasury. The two partners who give the affair up to me, owe 5,000,000 reals to different individuals; the bills are due, and they cannot pay. I have arranged everything, so that on the day of signing the treaty I shall hand them over the 5,000,000 in their own paper. And the person who holds them has made a private arrangement with me that these 5,000,000 will not be charged to me until the end of my contract; and that the day I sign it he is to send me 3,000,000 to commence with. For this I am to give him

a third of the profits . . . . . There is some idea of joining to this, a contract for supplying white bread to all the towns in Spain, which would double the importance of my enterprise; but I mean to commence by giving them a great opinion of my mode of working; so that by inspiring confidence, I may gain advantages which it is difficult for a beginner to obtain. I foresee that there are other things to be connected with the above, which will make the affair almost unlimited. But, I must say, like the honest Spaniards *poco à poco*. We must get into the saddle before galloping away; above all, we must be firm in the stirrups. It is nine in the evening; I am going out to converse about business. If I come back before eleven, I shall write you a few lines more.

"I come back, nothing is changed. I have signed the celebrated agreement which entitles me to treat in my own name with the Marquis D'Esquilace, Minister of War and Finance. Every one in Madrid is speaking of the affair. I am complimented upon it, as if it were a settled thing. I, who know it is not yet terminated, hold my tongue for the present.

"Good night, dear father, believe me you must be astonished at nothing; neither at my success, nor at the contrary, if it happens to me. There are altogether ten reasons in my favour, and a hundred against me. As to my age, I have just reached a point at which the vigour of the body united with that of the mind, constitute the prime of life. I shall soon be thirty-three. I was in a shop-window at twenty-four. I have made up my mind that the twenty succeeding years, which will bring me to my forty-fifth year, shall, after my long labours, produce that pleasant tranquillity, which I think can only be appreciated when looked upon as a reward for the troubles of youth. In the meanwhile, I laugh; my inexhaustible good humour does not leave me for a moment. I have been to some delightful suppers here. I might send you some verses, composed by your servant, on Spanish

seguedillas, which are very pretty vaudevilles; the words, however, of which, are generally worthless. The people say here, as in Italy, 'the words are nothing, the music is everything.

"I got in a passion when I heard such an absurdity. I chose the most popular air, a soft, touching, charming melody, and wrote words to it in an analogous strain.' When they were heard, my opinion was admitted to be the correct one, and I was overwhelmed with requests for words. But one moment, gentlemen; I must not let the amusements of the evening interfere with the work of the morning. Accordingly I continue to write and think about business all day, and in the evening give myself up to the pleasures of a society equally illustrious and well chosen. . . . My last seguedilla has been exceedingly fortunate, and is in the hands of every one who speaks French at Madrid. In truth, I laugh on my pillow when I think how strangely the affairs of this world are linked together, by what numerous and always out-of-the-way roads fortune is attained, and how, above all, the mind which is superior to circumstances can always find pleasure for itself, in the midst of these whirlpools of business affairs, pleasures, conflicting interests, sorrows, and hopes, which meet, clash, and fall powerless before it. . . .

"My dear Boisgarnier, this pretty seguedilla, and the accompaniment for the guitar, which I have composed (in a country where every one plays it, and yet cannot accompany my seguedillæ like myself, who, out of compliment to the country, throw off something from time to time, for their favourite instrument), you would sing away at it, until at last, perhaps, you would render it perfectly. You shall have the air, then, and the accompaniment I promise you, if I have a moment to spare, between now and the next post. But what should you say of me if I were to take it to you myself? Indeed, I am very near my departure: a word from the minister may start me off before the next fortnight.

"Good night, my dear father, it is half-past eleven. I am going to take some *sirop de capillaire*, for during the last three days, I have had a frightful cold in the head; but I wrap myself up in my Spanish cloak, with a good large hat, turned down over my forehead, which they call here, being *en capa y sombrero;* when a man throwing his cloak over his shoulder, conceals part of his face, they call that being *embassado.* I add this to my other precautions, and, in a carriage, carefully closed, go off to my business. I hope you continue to enjoy good health. In reading over this letter, which I send scribbled as it is, I have been obliged to make twenty erasures, to give it some sort of continuity. This will cure you of reading my letters to other persons, or making copies of them."

Beaumarchais' writing, indeed, exhibits all the rapidity of thought in this long letter, in which he passes from one subject to another with the most wonderful versatility,—in one place calculations, and the other philosophical reflections, elsewhere sentiment, then badinage, everywhere sincerity and enthusiasm; such is this Protean man. The following is another unpublished letter of his, in which he represents himself in the drawing-room of the Russian Ambassador at Madrid, at a card-table; which is so spirited and lively, that I have determined to give it entire. It is addressed to his sister Julie. Here we have Beaumarchais in another aspect.

"Madrid, Feb. 11, 1765.

"You will remember, dear Julie, that I promised you, in one of my last letters, the details of the persecution directed against me by the Russian Ambassador, which I have put a

stop to, as I ought; here they are, they will give you an idea of my life at Madrid—that is to say, of my evenings—for I give up the entire day to business.

"For some time, the Count of Buturlin, the Ambassador in question, who is son of the Grand Marshal of Russia, had been receiving me at his house with a predilection which caused it to be said, that he and the very pretty ambassadress were in love with me. In the evening they had cards or music, and supper, on which occasions I was the soul of the entertainment. The party was increased by all the ambassadors, who, before this time, had not seen much of one another. Since the return of the court to this town, their suppers had been charming, they said, because I was present at them; I had one evening won at *brelan*, although we were not playing high, 500 livres from the count, and 1500 from the countess; from that time we have played no more at *brelan*; and I was asked to play at faro, which nothing in the world would induce me to do. I had not been paid my 2,000 livres, but said nothing about it—every one knew of it—it was considered that I was behaving like an ambassador, and the count like a somewhat mean, private individual. At last, one evening, annoyed that the count, although he had just gained 100 louis, did not speak of what he owed me, I said aloud, 'If the count will lend me some gold, I will commit an act of folly, and play you at faro.' He could not avoid doing so, and passed me the 100 louis which he had just gained. I held the bank, but in an hour my poor bank was broken; the Duke of San-Blas gained fifty louis of me; the English Ambassador fifteen, the Russian twenty, &c. I was almost in the same position as if I had won nothing: I got up with a laugh and said, 'My dear count, we are quits!' 'Yes,' said he, 'but you will not say in future that you do not play at faro, and we hope you will henceforth join the rest of the company.' 'Willingly, if there are only a few louis to stake; but not to hold banks of a hundred.'

'That one,' said he, 'has not lost you much.' 'That is all that could be said,' I replied, 'if my debt had been a a bad one;' hereupon the countess interrupted the conversation. Madame de la C.* rose and told me to give her my arm: I left. There were sulks for two days; I went, nevertheless, to the Russain embassy as usual, and in order to seem not to have played a desperate game, lost every evening about ten or twelve louis, or perhaps won some of my stakes. One evening, when I had gained twenty louis on a bank of 200, I got up, and before going away, put all my winnings on two cards, both of which gained; I went on; everything succeeded; I broke the bank, which was held by the Marquis de Carrasola; the Chevalier de Guzman, put a hundred four louis pieces on the table, and said, 'Gentlemen, do not go away; I wager that M. de Beaumarchais will break this new bank also.' Having gained 200 louis, I considered myself obliged to reply to the invitation. I began playing; every one stopped, as there was no one else who played so high. Putting fifty louis on one side, and intending to let the rest be won back, so that I might never have to play again, I put ten louis on each card; when the card won I doubled. To be short, in two hours I had a hundred four-louis pieces. I rose, and went off to bed with my five hundred louis; of which I lost 150 the following day. Madame de C. said that I had played very generously, in allowing such a large sum to be won back from me, and that I could keep the rest. I was going away, when the Russian Ambassador addressing me personally, said, 'Will you no longer try your strength with me?' 'I have lost a great deal this evening,' I replied. 'But,' he replied quickly, 'you gained a great deal more yesterday.' 'M. le Comte,' I said, 'you know whether I care about the money I win at cards. I played in spite of myself; I have gained in

* This is the lady who sent the somewhat flippant message to old M. Caron, of which we have already spoken.

the face of reason, and you only press me in this way, because you know very well that I play without rules, and at a great disadvantage.' 'Parbleu!' he said; 'no one can play better than a man who wins, and a great deal of this money is mine.' 'Well, M. le Comte, how much did you lose?' 'One hundred and fifty louis,' he said. 'I shall lose, then,' I replied, '300 louis this evening, for, to the 150 which I have just given back to the bank, I will put 150 more against you, if you wish to play; so that all the advantage may be on your side; but I must stake twenty-five louis every time.' He took the cards, for this was just what he wanted. My luck continued; I won 200 louis, after which I rose and said, 'It would be folly on my part to play any longer: I should ruin you, sir; another day, luck may be against me, and you will get your money back.' 'What, sir, you are going? Par dieu! Win 500 louis from me, or let me win my money back.' 'No, M. le Comte, another time; it is four in the morning: a man may reasonably go to bed.' 'But, sir, you were more polite with the Chevalier de Guzman.' 'And, accordingly,' I replied, 'he lost his 500 louis. I am quite overcome by sleep! Will you have your 200 louis on one stake at *trente et quarante?*' 'No,' he said, 'at faro.' 'Gentlemen, I wish you good night.' The countess, his wife, rather vexed at her husband's loss, let the observation fall that I was 'more fortunate than polite.' I looked at her fixedly, and said, 'Madame l'Ambassadrice, you forget that, a week ago, you paid me a compliment of quite an opposite nature.' She blushed. I added nothing, and left. It was the fact that a week previously, when supping at Lord Rochford's, she had begged me, with clasped hands, to lend her thirty louis, to pay her losses with: and that I did so immediately, although I had lost, and remembered the affair of the *brelan*.

"The Count, then, owes me 200 louis, and the Countess 30, without reckoning the other 350 louis I had won; I swear my great oath not to play any more. I shall look on at the

game for a few days longer, without mixing myself up in the affairs of great people. The Ambassador looks at me like a dog, and does not speak to me; his wife appears embarrassed; not a word is said about payment, not an excuse is made for the delay. I complained to Madame de la C——, who the same evening took the Ambassador's physician on one side, and then made a terrible attack upon his master, declaring to him that if he did not behave differently towards me, she would reproach him with it; and finally, that he was an ill-bred, impertinent man.

"As my manner was always the same towards both husband and wife, every one was on my side. The next day the doctor brought me 200 louis to the house of Madame de la C——, where I was dining. She was very much offended, and sent word to the Ambassador that she would see him in the evening, and give him the lesson he deserved; that he ought to have brought the money to my own house, and to have apologised for his sulkiness and delay. I thought it best to take the 200 louis, for which the doctor asked me to give him a receipt. I laughed in his face, and wrote the Ambassador a letter, which was polite, but calculated to make him ashamed of himself. Two hours afterwards the Countess came to the house of Madame de la C——. I was no longer there. A grand explanation ensued. I did not set foot in the Russian Embassy for a week; at last the Countess sent the physician to me, to beg me to go and see her, and to complain of my absence. I replied, that in spite of the great privation I felt in no longer enjoying her society, I thought I ought not to make my appearance in a house where I had such good reason to be offended with the master.

"Madame de la C—— was appealed to; the Count was said to be sorry and ashamed of his conduct; I keep to the etiquette of the matter, and finally the Ambassador sent the Prince of Mezersky to me, to beg I would do him the honour to go in the evening to a concert and supper at his house. In the after-

noon the Count called to ask me if I wished to see the new piece in his box, saying that he was waiting to take me with him. I thought it better the interview should take place at his house, and replied that I was writing, but that I would have the honour to see him in the evening, according to his invitation. I arrived rather late on purpose, when the concert had commenced, and all the guests were present. I was surprised to find that I, who was previously looked upon as one of the family, and never announced, was now preceded by two pages, who ushered me into the concert room with great ceremony. The Countess was at the harpsichord; she advanced towards me, and said, as she presented the Count to me, that friends ought never to quarrel about a misunderstanding, and that they both hoped I would remain a friend of theirs: immediately afterwards she added—by way of sealing the reconciliation—M. de Beaumarchais, I have a desire to play the part of *Annette;* I hope you will accept that of *Lubin.* The Swedish Envoy will be the *Lord;* Prince Mezersky the *Bailiff;** and we have already begun the rehearsals. It was impossible for me to avoid accepting this kind offer. I went to the harpsichord at once, the orchestra began, and I sang the music of Lubin. Each went through as much as he knew of his part, after which we had a grand concert and a grand supper; good humour was restored. It is understood that I am to hear no more about card-playing, and that we are to amuse ourselves with pleasures which are more lively and will not tend to such grave results. The Countess, quite delighted, sent a page to me during dessert, with a note containing four lines in my praise, badly versified, it is true, but very flattering. She had composed them that very day—here they are—

'O toi à qui la nature a donné pour partage
Le talent de charmer avec l'esprit du sage,

* The principal characters in Rousseau's "Devin du Village."

Si Orphée, comme toi, eût eu des sons si flatteurs,
Pluton sans condition aurait fait son bonheur.'*

"This was no ordinary honour, I assure you; I replied to the compliment. The intimacy is greater than ever; we have balls, concerts, but no more card-playing, and I have 14,500 livres left. I have since written French words to a new Spanish seguedilla. There are 200 copies of it; people are tearing it from one another's hands. I must take care of it for you, with the music of the one I sent to your father. Good night. I have fulfilled my promise as well as I could. You know as much now about the affair of the cards as myself. I shall write on Wednesday to my Pauline and her aunt. In spite of the preparations of Annette I am afraid Lubin will be taken off before the piece is played. I may have to go in ten days."

As conceit was the besetting sin of Beaumarchais, who compares himself elsewhere to Alcibiades, one is tempted to ask whether he did not exaggerate his familiarity with these ambassadors; but among the papers relating to Spanish affairs are found letters from the Ambassador of England, Lord Rochford, which prove that the young and brilliant Frenchman was really the most popular man of the diplomatic corps in Madrid. His Parisian liveliness put all this somewhat formal world in movement; Lord Rochford is full of him; goes to the Prado with him; sups with him;

* Thou on whom bounteous nature has bestowed
The art of pleasing, with the sage's mind,
If Orpheus had produced such sounds as thine
Pluto, without conditions, would have freed him.

sings duets with him; and becomes quite jovial for an English diplomatist.* It was doubtless the card-playing scene which we have given, that formed the foundation for the calumnies uttered at a later period, during the Goëzman law-suits. In the anonymous letter which Beaumarchais publishes himself, and in which he is spoken of as an unfair player, not only did he play fairly, but I see from all his letters that he did not like play, and only consented to join in it under protest. At the period when he was living in great state in Paris, although his visitors played he never played himself. In the midst of all these commercial speculations and aristocratic pleasures, the future author of the "Barber of Seville" appears to have been always occupied with the affairs of his humble family: at one time displaying much talent, in forcing two or three ladies of noble family who were at Madrid, to pay long-standing accounts of his father's, for watches and jewels, without compromising his own position; at another time taking with fraternal good nature an active part in all the little incidents of the lives of his sisters in Paris; or, again quitting the saloons of the court for the modest residence of his sisters at Madrid.

"I saw Drouillet," † he writes to his father, "on my arrival; he and his wife have paid me a visit; but I do not cultivate

* See, in Appendix, No. 2, one of Lord Rochford's letters to Beaumarchais.

† A French banker residing at Madrid.

their society, although Drouillet is an estimable man, and as honest as the late Pichon, with a capital house at Madrid. The reason for my keeping away from them, is the ridiculous airs and manners of his wife, who, because she has a few crowns more than your daughters, spoke of them as "mesdemoiselles" before me, for which I had the honour to take her up. She was very desirous of getting me to her house, by all the attentions and invitations possible; but said nothing about my sisters, which made me say, in reply to all her politeness, that I had too short a time to remain at Madrid, not to give up all my leisure to my family. It is everywhere the same, and the ridiculous is of no country. We have here, what is called the great world, and little world of France. My sisters, too well educated to belong to the little world, are not considered sufficiently rich for the great one. Accordingly, the visits of *la* Drouillet were for me alone; upon this your son took the liberty of putting her in her proper place; which makes her say that I am malicious.* You know, my dear father, whether that is the case, and whether there is any malice in looking at things as they really exist, and saying what I think of them."

The eldest son of Madame Guilbert was at school in Paris; the child died; Beaumarchais, intrusted by his father to prepare his sister and brother-in-law for this sad news, replied by the following letter, which is evidently, it appears to me, the production of a man who is naturally good and full of delicate kindness.

"I have received your thick and mournful packet, which I have not yet entirely acted upon. I reserve this penance for

* The same accusation was afterwards made by Madame Goëzman.

my poor friends until their Lent. They have one son remaining, who is a very pretty child, as intelligent as possible, and who devours everything which is given him to learn. The only preparation I have made for imparting the sad news which I have to announce to them has consisted in caressing Eugenio very much since the reception of your letter; for which they appear to be very grateful. I gave him a louis for the Carnival, and I am having a very handsome hussar's dress made for him. I spoke to them of his brother, and pointed out to them the difference which existed between their capabilities and talents, and from one point to another at last brought them to confess the difficulty they felt about putting the elder elsewhere than in the king's guards, while the latter is intended for the engineers. I think I have now prepared them sufficiently, and that at the beginning of Lent I can tell them the news without any further hesitation."*

It appears that at this period he was already in correspondence with Voltaire, upon what subject I cannot say. "I have received M. de Voltaire's letter," he writes to his father from Madrid; "he compliments me, playfully, on my thirty-two teeth, my lively philosophy, and my age.† His letter is

* We may also quote a portion of Beaumarchais' private letter to his father, in which he exhibits a taste for peaceful and moderate pleasures, which are not generally attributed to him:—"It would be a delightful thing for me to look forward to, from time to time, if I could think I was about to pass a month or two with persons as happy as they are dear to me. What a pleasure, at the end of all my labours, to bury the rest of my existence in the midst of my relations and friends; all delighted with one another, and all knowing the value of comfort, without display, and of what is called the happy medium."

† I could not find this letter, dated 1764, in Voltaire's Corres-

very kind. But my letter made this answer so necessary that I think I should have written it myself. He desires some details with regard to the country in which I am; but my best answer will be that which M. de Caro made yesterday to the Marchioness d'Arissa at M. de Grimaldi's. She had asked him what he thought of Spain. "Madam," replied he, "wait until I have left it for my answer. I am too sincere, and too polite, to give it at the house of one of the king's ministers." Sometimes bad news reached Beaumarchais from France. He experienced losses, his plans at Madrid were not succeeding. He then writes as follows:—

"I strengthen myself by work against calamity. As soon as I quit the oar, misfortunes and losses overwhelm me on all sides. The gaiety of my disposition, and I dare to add, while rendering thanks to Providence, the force of my mind, together with my frequent reverses, all combine to prevent me succumbing. When I have torn away an ounce of flesh from my lips on the past, I work seriously at the present, and cannot help smiling at the future. I have already lost three or four times more than I possess in the world; unworthy enemies have intercepted my path. Poor Pichon is ruining me at St. Domingo; but here I am, nevertheless, shaking my square head, and recommencing cheerfully the work of the Danaïdes."

We should never finish, if we tried to study

pondence, as afterwards edited by Beaumarchais. He had, probably lost it.

every shade of Beaumarchais' mind and disposition, in this correspondence of his youth. I have looked through it with curiosity, for some traces of his opinion on the Spanish Drama. It is rather astonishing to find that on this point he confined himself to a few unimportant observations. He directs his attention more to manners and customs than to the stage. All that he says about it, may be said to be limited to a passage in a letter to the Duke de la Vallière, dated December 24, 1764, in which Beaumarchais, after going into long details on the subject of the administration, politics, and manners of Spain, expresses himself thus :—

"The Spanish theatre is at least two centuries younger than ours; both as regards decency and the plays themselves, they may figure with propriety by the side of those of Hardy and his contemporaries. Their music, on the other hand, may be ranked immediately after the beautiful Italian music, and before our own. The warmth and gaiety of the interludes, all in music, with which they divide the wearisome acts of their insipid dramas, very often compensate for the *ennui* which is produced by listening to them. They are called *tonadillas* or *saynètes*. Dancing is absolutely unknown here. I speak of figure dancing, for I cannot honour with this name the grotesque and often indecent movements of the Moorish dances, and those of Grenada, which constitute the delight of the people."*

* In the Appendix, No. 3, will be found this long unpublished letter to the Duke de la Vallière. It offers some rather interesting information about Spain in 1764.

This extract would seem to prove that Beaumarchais has no high opinion of the Spanish Theatre. The time has not yet arrived for us to examine how much he derived from it. It is manifest that he produced an entire alteration in the types which he borrowed from it. But, on the other hand, it can be seen, even from this letter, that the general action of the Spanish Comedy, above all, the liveliness of the interludes and sayuètes, produced a marked impression upon him. When he left Spain, after a year's residence there, he had failed in his commercial speculations; but he came back richer than he was himself aware; for he brought with him the first lineaments of those strongly-marked and original characters, Figaro, Rosina, Almaviva, Bartholo and Basile, who were one day to be the glory of his name.

CHAPTER VI.

BEAUMARCHAIS ON HIS RETURN FROM SPAIN.—AN EPISODE IN HIS PRIVATE LIFE.—HIS LOVE AFFAIR WITH PAULINE.—BEAUMARCHAIS' LOVE-LETTERS.—FIGARO, PAULINE'S FRIEND.

BEFORE following Beaumarchais in his literary career, which we shall see him enter upon soon—rather late in life, in fact in his thirty-sixth year—we must first of all direct our attention to a love affair in which he was engaged, not on another person's behalf, (as in the Clavijo episode), but on his own account. The affair had been going on for some years, and was only brought to a termination about the period of his life at which we have arrived.

In Beaumarchais' letter to his sister Julie, which we have just quoted, the following sentence occurs: "I shall write on Wednesday to *my Pauline* and her aunt." In other letters, which were written some months later, he speaks of selling all his appointments in France, and going to settle in St. Domingo "with *Pauline*." Finally, in the weakest, but per-

haps the most correctly written of his three dramas, "The Two Friends," he represents, with much success, a young person of amiability and distinction, to whom he gives the name of Pauline, and introduces several family scenes which seem to have been copied from nature.

There existed, then, a Pauline who exercised a certain influence over his heart: I say a *certain influence*, for I must confess with regret, that in what I have seen of Beaumarchais' love-letters, written at different periods, I have not found any proof of his ever having been deeply in love. Indeed, this happiness, or misfortune, is not common, and Rochefoucauld was right when he said: "It is with love, as with the apparition of spirits: every one speaks of them, but few have seen them; love lends its name to an infinite number of affairs which are attributed to it, and with which it has no more concern than the doge has with what takes place in Venice." Beaumarchais had a great many of these affairs, of which La Rochefoucauld speaks; but if women have often been the amusement of his life, they have never been either its occupation, its inspiration, or its torment. "My recreation, after the business of the day," he writes somewhere, "consists in the 'Belles Lettres,' beautiful music, and *sometimes* in the society of beautiful women." The word *sometimes*, is inserted from modesty. On this point, as in many others, Beaumar-

chais was a child of his century; he has many amiable qualities, but in love he is superficial, more sensual than sentimental, and altogether very much of a pagan in his attachments, and even, as a pagan, not susceptible of any very strong passion. We must not expect from him, then, either the jealous transport of an Othello, nor the hidden torment of Molière, nor the ecstacy of Rousseau at Eaubonne, in the neighbourhood of Madame d'Houdetot, nor that ardent thirst for the unchangeable and infinite in love which inspired the author of the "Meditations" with the *Lake*.* Besides, Beaumarchais' affair was a little romance in the approved style, which was to terminate with a marriage: it was that, perhaps, which cooled Beaumarchais' ardour, and which, while it held his habitually free pen somewhat in check, at the same time makes his style appear somewhat common place, when we reflect that he is attempting to convey to a young girl the expression of his candid and sincere affection. Accordingly, Pauline's letters are much more interesting than his. In the meanwhile, it will be seen that his part in the romance is a curious and rather a novel one for him, inasmuch as he at last claims to be regarded as a victim, and really is a victim in one way, while it only requires a certain amount of confidence in his statements for us to believe that his deception had driven him almost to

* Lamartine.

madness. He here appears, as the antithesis to Clavijo; Pauline is the Clavijo, or rather, there is a Clavijo who takes Pauline from him. Let us endeavour to arrive at the truth of this matter by means of a somewhat voluminous packet of papers, on which Beaumarchais has written with his own hand, "*Affair* of Mademoiselle Le B——, afterwards Madame de S——." The names are written in full length; but although the adventure is more than a century old, it appears to me better to confine myself to the initials only, my object in giving this detail of Beaumarchais' private life being solely that of studying and analysing thoroughly the mind and character of a man who may be taken as a fair representative of the ideas and character of his epoch.

And in the first place, let us thank Heaven that that there really was an affair of business, that is to say, a debt in connexion with this episode of love; otherwise it would have met with the fate of other episodes of the same nature which the elder Gudin, the worthy cashier who arranged the papers of Beaumarchais after his death, has treated with sovereign contempt—tearing up the papers relating to them in so complete a manner, that all my efforts to replace the fragments in their proper places were quite in vain. In the case of the Pauline episode, Gudin has been of some help to me. Directly there appeared to be a debt in connexion with the matter, every paper bear-

ing upon the subject became sacred, and it is only in the character of "proofs in writing," that some very affectionate letters, from a most amiable young girl, have been suffered to live through a period of ninety-two years, classed, numbered, and docketed. If the claim has now expired, the letters remain, and there is a certain pleasure in discovering on the decayed paper, in all their life, the palpitations of a heart which has long ceased to beat, but which had once its moments of youth and love.

Pauline Le B—— was a young Creole, and was born in the island of St. Domingo, which, as the reader is aware, at that time belonged to France. She was an orphan, and had been brought up in Paris, under the direction of her aunt: she possessed an estate of some magnitude, which was estimated at two million francs, but which was much encumbered with debts, and had been much worked and much exhausted by the trustees, as often happens to the estate of a minor, above all when the estate is in the colonies; so that, with all the appearance and expectation of having a large fortune, Pauline was in reality poor enough: but she was very pretty, and in all the letters in which she is mentioned she is always called the *beautiful,* or the *charming Pauline.*

In one of these letters her *gentle, delicate, child-like* appearance, and her *enchanting voice* are spoken of: it has been already seen, from one of old M.

Caron's letters, that she was a very good musician. She was the *Pauline*, then, of "The Two Friends," "with," as Mélac says, "a charming face, a flexible and sympathetic voice, and, above all, full of soul."

Mademoiselle le B——'s aunt was distantly related to the Caron family. The intimacy between the two families appears to have been great, as far back as 1760. Beaumarchais, who lost his first wife when he was about twenty-eight years of age, was, as the reader is aware, of very prepossessing appearance, and to his natural advantages was now added a certain *éclat*, which he obtained from his position at the court: soon afterwards he bought the places of King's Secretary and Lieutenant-General of the Preserves; made some fortunate speculation with Du Verney; installed his family, as I have before stated, in the house in the Rue de Condé, where he spent all the time which was left him by his occupations at Versailles; worshipped by his sisters, and paying a great deal of attention to their friend Pauline, who was then about eighteen or nineteen. The first scene of "The Two Friends," which represents Pauline sitting at the harpsichord, playing a sonata, while Mélac, standing behind her, is playing the violin; the playful, affectionate conversation which follows the sonata—all this has the appearance of a reminiscence. Beaumarchais not only made a point of trying to please Pauline, he rendered her important services: he endeavoured to penetrate

the confused state of her resources, and to get her property into a more satisfactory condition; with this view he obtained an introduction from the Princesses to M. de Clugny, the Governor of St. Domingo, and altogether behaved like a devoted lover and a sincere friend.

It will be easily understood that the young Creole soon formed a strong inclination for so amiable a guardian.. The guardian, on his side, seemed much struck with the charms of his pupil; nevertheless, as love never deprived him of his reason, before making up his mind to ask for Pauline's hand, he sent one of his own relations to St. Domingo with a sum of 10,000 francs, and a considerable cargo of different articles suitable to the requirements of Pauline's habitation. This relation had also a special commission to ascertain the exact state of Mademoiselle B——'s fortune, and see what could best be done with her property. It was after his departure, in 1763, that the correspondence took place between Pauline and Beaumarchais, from which we are about to make some extracts. To understand the first letter, it must be known that Pauline, who had been brought up by a widow aunt, had an uncle in Paris, who was a widower, and who, consequently, was not her aunt's husband. This uncle was tolerably rich, and had no children. Let us now listen to Beaumarchais in love, but at the same time perfectly prudent, and indulging

in a number of periphrases in order to maintain the alliance between love and prudence.

"You thought I was sad, my dear, amiable Pauline, but I was only occupied with a number of things I had to say to you, and which appear to me so serious and important, that while thinking of them, I came to the conclusion that I could not do better than write them to you, so that, having them before you on paper, you might at once understand their full import. If I spoke to you on the subject, you would perhaps only remember the general tenor of my remarks, and might thus end by misunderstanding them, and it is very important that things upon which the happiness of my life depends, should be clearly explained. You must have been aware, my dear Pauline, that a sincere and lasting attachment was the cause of my doing all I have done for you; although I have been sufficiently prudent not to make a direct proposition for your hand, until I knew I could place you in a proper position. All my actions must have proved what my intentions were, and that they were honourable. Now that I have carried out my promises, and advanced money for the settlement of your affairs, I am anxious to gather the sweet fruit of my labours; I even spoke of it yesterday to your uncle, who appeared favourably disposed towards me. I must even confess to you that I went so far as to flatter myself that you would not withhold your consent when I explained to you clearly what my intentions were. Pardon me, my dear Pauline; it was not in any spirit of presumption that I made this avowal to him. I thought I might look upon your constant friendship as an earnest of what I stated. Will you disavow me? One thing alone stops me, my dear Pauline: I find that with care and proper economy, the state of my affairs will enable me to offer you an agreeable future, and this is the sole object of my heart: but if, by some dreadful misfortune, all the money which I have sent to St.

Domingo should be lost in setting to rights an affair, the particulars of which we at present know only through the representations of others, my means would not allow me to maintain you in the position in which I should first of all have placed you, and in that case, how great would be my grief! I should encounter universal censure, and my Pauline would be in comparative distress. This uncertainty is then the only reason which compels me to delay asking for your hand, for which I have long sighed. I do not know what you are entitled to from your uncle's property, either on account of the dowry of your late aunt, or on account of the debts which I have heard spoken of indirectly. It would be unbecoming on my part to ask for any explanation on this point, either from you or from him. My disposition is averse to it; and as his niece, for whom he appears to have much affection, may hope to receive some favours from him on the occasion of her marriage, it appears to me that it would be wrong to go into any strict reckonings, which should never take place between relations who are on good terms with one another. I shall not, then, say a word upon this subject.

"However, my dear Pauline, in order to be happy, it is necessary we should be at ease with respect to our future existence; and I should no sooner have clasped you in my arms, than I should tremble lest some misfortune should make us lose the money sent to America; for to that purpose I have set aside no less than 80,000 francs. This, my dear Pauline, will explain a silence which, after what I had done, must have appeared strange to you. There are two courses open to you if you accept my offer: the first is to wait until the full success of my plans enables me to place you in a proper position; the second, that you should get your aunt, if my views be agreeable to her, to ascertain the opinion of your uncle on the subject. Far from wishing, however, that he should diminish his means in order to increase yours, I am quite ready to give up a portion of my own property, in order

to render his old age more comfortable, if the present position of his affairs should require it. You know me well enough to believe that I would make any such advances. But, if his affection for you should induce him to settle anything upon you, my desire is that you should, under no circumstances, succeed to whatever property he may bestow on you, until death should prevent him enjoying it himself: and since what a person gives at his death will soon cease to belong to him at all, I do not think it would be unbecoming to solicit some such favour from an uncle, who will act as a father to you on the occasion of your marriage, and who has a right to expect increased happiness in his old age from your care and attention. With some assurance from him on this point, we shall be able to conclude our happy union, and to look upon the money which has been sent away as a sort of nest-egg for the future in case of success, while in case of failure, we shall be compensated for it by the kindness of your uncle. Give me your opinion on the subject when you send your answer. My affection for you will always stand before everything else, even before my prudence. My fate is in your hands—yours is in that of your uncle."

Freed from all its rhetorical artifice, this periphrastic letter means, "I love you very much, but I cannot marry you until I know what your estate will bring in, or until your uncle promises to leave you his fortune."

Let those, however, who may be inclined to exclaim at this excessive prudence on the part of Beaumarchais, remember that on the score of friendship he had shown no prudence at all when he advanced a considerable capital in money and goods for the St. Domingo estate. It is at the same time true, that a

sensitive girl might not have felt much flattered by this exhibition of affection and self interest; but a person who is in love, does not always look at things so closely: and the proof that Pauline's heart was engaged more deeply than that of Beaumarchais' is found in her reply. It will, I think, be found more interesting than the somewhat involved epistle which the reader has just seen. It appears to me to express the true sentiments of an ingenuous and devoted young heart. Here it is.

"Your letter, my dear friend,* has thrown me into a state of great trouble. I did not feel myself able to reply to it alone, and at the same time I thought it best not to show it to my aunt, as her affection for me—which is what I value most in her—would have been of no assistance to me. You will doubtless be astonished at the intrepid step I took: the moment was favourable, your letter was pressing, and my embarassment was perhaps of more assistance to me than the best advice. I went and threw myself into my uncle's arms; the ice was broken; I opened my heart to him without reserve; I asked him to guide me with his advice and affection; and at last ventured, my dear friend, to give him your letter without your consent. All this was a sudden impulse of my own, and I am pleased that I overcame my blushes and timidity in order that he might himself know the inmost feelings of my heart. It appeared to me as though the confidence I was placing in him increased his kindness. Indeed, my dear friend, I am very pleased at having gone to see him of my own accord. I became convinced, from conversing with him, of his good feeling towards me; and what pleased me

* Monsieur mon bon ami.

still more was, that I found he was full of esteem for you, and rendered you all that justice which your friends render you with so much pleasure. I like him a thousand times more for it. With regard to the answers to the important points in your letter, he wishes to speak to you about them himself. I should acquit myself too imperfectly of such a task to think of undertaking it. He wishes to see you on the subject.

"You tell me that your fate is in my hands, and that mine is in those of my uncle. I now make my interests over to you. If you love me as I think you do, try and transfuse some of your own affectionate enthusiasm into the heart of my uncle. Your heart and intellect must on this occasion work together, my dear friend, and nothing can then resist you. Give me this proof of your affection. I shall look upon your success as the most convincing proof of your anxiety for what you call so charmingly the 'happiness of your life;' words which your foolish Pauline could not read without her heart beating in a fearful manner. Adieu, my dear friend; I hope your first visit, after leaving Versailles, will be to my uncle. Think of all the respect you owe him in case he should become yours also. I conclude, as I feel that I am writing the most extravagant nonsense possible. Good-night, torment."

The uncle having apparently refused to bind himself in a formal manner, the union between Pauline and Beaumarchais was nevertheless not broken off; but it was agreed that it should be postponed until after the settlement of the St. Domingo affairs. In the meanwhile they continued to see and love one another, and the heart of the young Creole became more and more and deeply committed. The packet I have before me only contains a few of her letters: the others were sent back to her at her own request, after the rup-

ture; but, as often happens in such a case, Beaumarchais took care to keep the most strongly marked ones: perhaps Pauline, on her side, acted in the same manner; for in the series of her lover's letters, there occurs now and then an hiatus which throws a slight shadow over the various incidents of this little domestic romance.

In general, those of Beaumarchais' letters which remain in the packet are wanting in enthusiasm and poetry. One would think that so charming a person would have inspired something better. However, some of his strange epistles are not without interest, as tending to explain that original and complex character known as Figaro. It has been sometimes said that the analytic, reasoning side of this character, who is otherwise so active and bustling, was purely artificial —that it was only a device for enabling the author to introduce allusions to things of the day, and satirical observations on society. Now, it is easy enough to see in the letters from Madrid, which we have quoted, how much Beaumarchais was naturally a man both of action and analysis—an Abbé de Gondi and a Montaigne; how much he delights in interrupting his narratives from time to time for the sake of philosophising at random either about himself or any one else. This peculiarity is shown in a still more striking manner in his correspondence with Pauline. In the famous Monologue of the fifth act of the "Marriage

of Figaro," the hero appears in a strange light; choosing, as he does, the very moment when he is eaten up with jealousy, for entering upon a dissertation *de omni re scibili:* but not less strange does Beaumarchais appear, when at the age of thirty he sends dissertations in the style of the following to a young girl, who loves him and with whom he is in love.

"I thank you, my dear Pauline, for the praises you award to my first letter,* but it has assuredly been more successful than you can be aware. It has touched your *amour propre:* a desire to reproach me produces the necessity of writing to me, and hence I have a letter from you. That is all I desired; the summit of my wishes has been attained. You have written to me first, for my letter which you complain of can scarcely be considered one at all. The second is of a different kind, it having been necessitated by business. It follows from all this that you have been the first to write. My self-love is gratified, and when we say self-love, we mean love also, for the latter feeling is only an extension of the former towards an object which we consider worthy of us. We love ourselves when we love our mistress, and applaud the judicious choice which testifies to our good taste; we love ourselves when we lavish our affection upon her, and thus endeavour to incline her heart towards us. . . . All the happiness or unhappiness of life must be looked at from one point of view; it must be considered with reference to its effect upon ourselves; without this self-love we can experience no passion at all. It is of divine origin, and the love of a charming creature is only so delightful because it proceeds

* Not the letter we have quoted, but a previous one, full of *badinage*, which Beaumarchais had sent, saying that he was determined not to commence the correspondence.

secretly from love of self. Pardon me, my darling Pauline, if I assume the character of a metaphysician; what I have written has escaped me, and cannot be altogether obscure to so enlightened, delicate, and refined a perception as yours. I leave, then, or rather, I abjure all trifling, as your affectionate love must expect something more serious from me."

We would think now that Beaumarchais was about to indulge in sentiment. Not at all so; he is about to commence another dissertation, but on another point.

"Listen to me, fair child; the pen should be directed by the impulse of sentiment alone: the man who reflects when he is writing to his mistress is a knave, and is deceiving her. What can it matter about a letter being nicely phrased, about the periods being well rounded? True love is not particular about such details: love begins a sentence which it thinks a good one, breaks it off to begin another, which strikes it as better; a third suggests itself, which has more warmth than either of the others; confusion ensues; through having so much to express, you express it badly! Ah! this confusion is sweet food for the heart which finds it on the paper. The epidemic, in spite of space and time is communicated by reading the letter, and the charm is willingly shared of a confusion, which one is conscious of having been the first to produce. She says to herself, 'When my lover writes or speaks about business matters, he does so in a sensible manner, his ideas are linked together, his conclusions follow naturally from his premises; everything proceeds to one common end: but as soon as he gives his pen up to his poor heart, he commences tranquilly, then warms up, at last wanders, and refuses to be guided on his road. Thinking of one thing alone, how can it matter to him what he says, provided he proves that he loves? Well, you are right, my dear little girl, and I accept the

privilege which your example gives me.* I tell you that I love you: I repeat it; do you believe it? If you doubt, the misfortune is your own. My own consciousness of my affection constitutes my real happiness; your opinion of it only occupies a secondary position. I would rather forgive your injustice than deserve it. In the first place, the love we feel, in the second that which we inspire; such are the real gradations in the soul's happiness. What can I say to you? My heart is full of your last thought. It will require more than half an hour of silence and repose, before it can regain the calmness which the noble fire that elevates it when I write to you has caused it to lose; but, far from complaining, I delight in this situation.

"Ah! good heavens! I was going to begin another sheet, and I have no more paper; I have not been writing more than five minutes . . . . . Marchand,† in future I must have some *papier à la Tellière* for my letters to Paris."

While making allowance for Beaumarchais' fondness for dissertation, we may, perhaps, be allowed to call in question the sincerity of a love which he concludes with such a peroration. While he is endeavouring to prove that a certain want of connexion in ideas is one of the characteristics of passion—which is quite true—the writer of the letter

* The privilege of *tutoiement*, or of using the *tu* and *toi* of the singular, instead of the *vous* of the plural.—TRANS.

It will be seen that Pauline adopted the *tutoiement* first. This was sometimes the case in the eighteenth century, according to the "Nouvelle Héloïse," in which Julie is made to take the initiative in the familiar mode of address.

† Beaumarchais' servant.

does not appear to join the example to the precept; afterwards he appears to be striving his utmost to attain the desired confusion, and it is difficult to find any signs of the "noble fire" which deprives him of his calmness, the more so as the writing itself is particularly quiet and subdued. Beaumarchais is seen to greater advantage when he is satisfied with being simple, gay, and good-humoured, as in the following note:—

"Good day, dear aunt; I embrace you, my beloved Pauline; your servant, my charming Perrette.* My little children, love one another; it is the precept of the apostle. One of you will love me, I sometimes say to myself, as her son, one of you will love me as her brother; while my Pauline, uniting all kinds of love in her good little heart, will inundate me with a deluge of affection, to which I shall reply according to the power given by Providence to your devoted servant, your sincere friend, your future . . . . . But stop; what was I about to write? It would have gone beyond the bounds of the profound respect with which I have the honour to be, Mademoiselle, &c. &c."

In the meanwhile this preface to marriage, as it continued so long, was not without danger to Pauline. The interviews became more and more frequent, the aunt exercised no very strict surveillance; Beaumarchais, who at a distance, that is to say, in his letters,

* This charming Perrette—who used to live with the aunt, in what capacity I am unable to say—was soon the cause of much uneasiness to Pauline, and afterwards became the pretext for her rupture with Beaumarchais.

does not seem very dangerous, was much more so when he was near; he then no longer dealt in dissertations; he sincerely intended to marry Pauline, and consequently to respect her: if he had been more in love with her, this respect would have been an easier matter; but he was more loved than loving. In "The Two Friends" Mélac is a very "impressionable" but not less virtuous young man, who, when his father blames him for being too familiar with Pauline, blushes, and protests that nothing can be purer than the bottom of his heart. Beaumarchais was a Mélac who had been cured of any excess of modesty by his court life, and much less harmless than the lover in his drama. There occurred, then, a few rather warm moments in the course of this *liaison*, in which Pauline found it necessary to summon to her aid all the stock of virtue with which the eighteenth century provided young girls who were deeply in love, and very little looked after. Now, we know that this stock was slender enough. Let us hope, nevertheless, that it was sufficient to save Pauline. What was taking place is only revealed to us by some of her letters, which are rather expressive. "Farewell, love!" cries the young Creole, at the end of one of her letters; "Farewell, my soul! Farewell every thing! Your return will be to me like the sun of a fine day! Farewell." But, although Pauline's letters are of the most affectionate description, they at the

same time testify to a firm determination on her part to overcome the danger of her position; and what helps us to believe that she succeeded in doing so is, that after all, it was she, as will be seen, who refused to marry Beaumarchais.*

If Pauline's betrothed was not sufficiently respectful, was he at least faithful? While thus troubling her virtue, does he permit her to think herself the sole object of his affection? My position as a faithful reporter obliges me to declare that Beaumarchais is to be suspected as regards his fidelity. I find in one of his sister Julie's letters of this period a passage which tells against him, and which is at the same time a little domestic picture, in which with her accustomed *verve* she represents three

* When I first published these papers I thought it right to reproduce *in extenso* one of Pauline's most strongly-marked letters, in which I found a mixture of artlessness and boldness which, in a young girl who had been well brought up, appeared to me worthy of observation, as indicating what I may call the "moral temperature" of the eighteenth century. But, persons whose approbation is dear to me, have made the objection that this letter, although dictated by praiseworthy sentiments, related entirely to a subject of a very delicate nature, and that its publication might expose me to an inconvenience which every writer should wish to avoid—that of not being able to be read by every one. This is one of the dangers which it is difficult to avoid in a work on Beaumarchais and his times, which aims at accuracy and a certain completeness. However, it is better to err on the side of reserve than on the contrary one, and I have therefore determined to suppress Pauline's letter.

pairs of lovers, who at the beginning of 1764 were enlivening the establishment in the Rue de Condé, and the old age of M. Caron, senior, with their preparations for marriage. All the characters but one, of whom we shall hear directly, are already known to the reader; he will perhaps be pleased to see them once more grouped by the lively and amusing pencil of Julie.

"Our house," she writes to her friend Helen, "is a nest of lovers, living in love and hope. I laugh at it more than any of the others, because I am less in love than any of them; but I can understand that, to the philosophic eye, it would present a picture equally useful and interesting. Beaumarchais is a perverse being, who by his levity teases and grieves Pauline. Boisgarnier and Miron discuss sentiment until they are out of breath, and reason themselves systematically into a state of sublime irrationality; the Chevalier and myself are even worse; he as loving as an angel, as affectionate as a seraph, while I am as lively as a linnet, and as malicious as a demon. Love does not make me so lack-adaisical as the others, but nevertheless, in spite of my mad disposition, I cannot escape from it altogether; that is the worst of the matter."

Indeed, Julie in spite of her off-hand manner cares rather more for the Chevalier than she chooses to admit. This new character, who is about to play a part in the episode we have undertaken to narrate, was the Chevalier de S——. He was born, I think, at St. Domingo, and was the Deputy Advocate-General

at the Supreme Council. Although a compatriot of Pauline's he did not know her when he first became acquainted with Beaumarchais, who introduced him to his family, and witnessed with pleasure the attention he paid to his sister Julie. He was, it appears, rather poor, but he had a name, a good position, and would have been a good match for Julie, who had no fortune beyond what she might expect from the generosity of her brother.

Things were in this position when Beaumarchais started for Spain, still engaged to Pauline, who continued to write him very affectionate letters, complaining occasionally that he omitted to answer them, while Julie was imprudent enough to amuse herself by teasing the young Creole with accounts of the gaiety of her devoted servant at Madrid. "When are you coming back?" exclaims Pauline in one of her letters. "Horrid journey! how it distresses me, gracious Heaven!" And Julie, who is always kind, in spite of her satire, and who is very found of Pauline, attacks in her way the laziness of her brother and tells him to "write a word to this child."

Although Pauline's betrothed does not appear sufficiently ardent in his affection, we must acknowledge that he looks after her interest with all the zeal of a sincere friend. The news which he receives from St. Domingo by the relative whom he had sent there is unfavourable: the estate is in a deplorable condition,

and mortgaged beyond its value; the relative himself dies, and all the money and goods which Beaumarchais had intrusted to him had been sunk, as Beaumarchais had feared it would be, in the property. In spite of this, Beaumarchais, on his return from Spain, seemed still resolved to marry Pauline. He thought of letting the estate be sold by the creditors, and buying it in himself, but he was told that if well administered, it would produce a considerable revenue. In the meanwhile, a misunderstanding arose between himself and his betrothed, which was occasioned in the first instance by his own levity. In the midst of it all, he heard that the Chevalier de S——, who had first of all appeared as an aspirant for the hand of his sister Julie, had now views on Pauline. The Chevalier denies it strongly in a letter to Beaumarchais, which terminates as follows:—

"It appears to me, sir, that a story without foundation should find less favour in your eyes than in those of any one else, both because yours are better, and because you have been all your life the victim of such tales. However, I beg you to believe that I do not write to you in order to obtain your pardon, but because it is a duty I owe to myself and to Mademoiselle Le B——, to make the truth known with regard to a subject which compromises her, and because it would be painful, and very painful to me, to lose your esteem."

Pauline, when interrogated on the subject, replied

by this very abrupt note, which already indicates a considerable alteration in her sentiments:—

"As I was unaware, before I received your letter, of the Chevalier's intentions, and as the whole affair is unintelligible to me, you will allow me to enlighten myself before I send you an answer. With regard to the reproach you address to me in reference to Julie, I do not think I deserve it: if I have not sent to inquire after her as often as I ought to have done, it was because I had been assured that she was much better, and that she had been seen at the window, which made me think that the news of her improvement was true. If my aunt were not suffering from her attack of erysipelas, which prevents me leaving the house, I should certainly go and see her: I embrace her with all my heart."

Both the accused parties were in all probability innocent at this period, if I can judge by a letter from a cousin of Pauline's, who was one of Beaumarchais' friends, and who, after being addressed by him on the subject in a very violent manner, replies: "When you are in a more tranquil state of mind, and render me justice, I will speak to you openly, and I will prove to you, that you, who condemn others so easily, are more guilty than those whom you accuse of dissimulation, treachery, or perfidy. Nothing is so pure as the heart of dear Pauline, more noble than that of the Chevalier, or more sincere than mine, and yet you look upon all three of us as monsters!" The same letter indicates that Beaumarchais, in his irritation, was no longer willing to marry Pauline; for

it contains the following passage: "You tell me to keep the contents of your letter secret; rest assured that I shall do so: but I think it singular that you should determine not to marry Mademoiselle le B——, and yet require me not to mention it."

What took place between the date of this letter—(and, we may state parenthetically that it is almost the only one which *is* dated, a point which has rendered the sifting of this affair rather a difficult matter)—what took place between the date of the last letter, November 8, 1765, and the date of February 11, 1766, which appears to be that of the final rupture between Pauline and Beaumarchais? Here a slight hiatus occurs; but enough documents have been preserved to enable us to understand the contents of those which are missing. It is evident that what was at first but a report, perhaps without foundation, became gradually the truth. Whether Pauline's love ceased under the influence of Beaumarchais' *levities* (and it will be seen further on, that that was the reason or pretext alleged), or whether the long delay and the hesitation which he exhibited in making up his mind to the marriage wounded her *amour propre*, or alarmed her about the future, or whether she simply took a fancy to the Chevalier de S——, it is certain that she became more and more attached to him. The Chevalier, on the other hand, who a year previously, in writing to Beaumarchais, had said of Julie, "She is the only object of my

thoughts and affection;" the Chevalier, whether he had been set at liberty by Julie, or had set himself at liberty, was becoming attracted more and more towards Pauline, and at last appeared to be on the point of supplanting Beaumarchais. At this juncture, Beaumarchais, on the same day, wrote two letters, one after another, to Pauline, which I give almost entire, not as models of style, for they have no literary value, but because they appear to me to contain materials which are of use for the study of mankind in general, and that of Beaumarchais in particular.

In novels, each impulse of the human heart is generally represented by itself, in sharp, strongly-marked, unmixed colours. In real life, however, we find that when an impulse is not sufficiently powerful (which is generally the case) to stifle all the others, the human heart presents a spectacle of confusion, in which very different (and often contrary) feelings are at work at the same time. Thus, in the letters which are about to be placed before the reader, may be distinguished a remnant of love, awakened and excited by jealousy, but repressed in its utterance by vanity; scruples of delicacy and honour, fears of what the world will say, a wish to prove that the writer has nothing to reproach himself with, an intention to marry the young lady, and yet a certain unwillingness to be taken at his word; for although these letters contain a very formal offer of marriage, they

also contain passages which are sufficiently abrupt and cutting to make Pauline reply by a refusal. On the other hand, it is evident, above all, in the second letter, that Beaumarchais fears this refusal, and either from love, or self-love,* wishes to prevent it:—

"You have given me up," he writes to Pauline; "and what period have you chosen for doing so? That which I intended, before your friends and my own, to be the epoch of our union. I have seen perfidy taking advantage of weakness, in order to turn everything, even my own offers, against myself. I have seen you—you who have so often complained of the acts of injustice which men have committed towards me—I have seen you join with them to inflict on me injuries of which I had never dreamt. If I had not meant to marry you, should I have attended so little to the usual forms in the services which I have rendered you? Should I have assembled my friends two months before your refusal, to tell them my final resolution, which I had asked them to keep secret in consequence of certain precautions which I could not mention, but which made it absolutely necessary for me to act as I did? Everything has been turned against me. The conduct of a doubled-faced and perfidious friend,† whilst it gave me a painful lesson, at the same time taught me that there was no woman, however amiable and affectionate, who could not be seduced and caused to change. At the same time the contempt of all who witnessed his conduct is his just reward. Let me now come back to yourself. It is not without regret that I have directed my thoughts towards you, since the first warmth

* It has been seen above, that, according to his theory the two feelings were inseparable.

† This is evidently intended for the Chevalier de S——.

of my resentment has passed away; and when I insisted that you should state to me in writing that you rejected my offer of marriage, there was mixed with my annoyance a secret curiosity to know whether you would take that final step. I must now satisfy my conscience about it completely. I have received a very advantageous proposition of marriage; as I was on the point of accepting it, I all at once felt myself unable to do so. Some scruple of honour—some recollection of the past, made me hesitate. I ought certainly to consider myself free and released from all obligations to you after what has taken place. However, I am not at rest; your letters do not tell me, in a sufficiently formal way, what it is so necessary for me to know. Tell me truly, I beg of you—Have you so entirely given me up, that I am at liberty to contract an engagement with another woman? Consult your heart on this point while my scrupulousness puts the question to you. If you have totally severed the knot which was to have united us, do not fear to tell me so forthwith. In order that your *amour propre* may be quite at ease with regard to the request I am making to you, I must add that I now place all things in the same position they were in before all this misunderstanding. My request would not be just if by way of laying a snare for you I did not leave you at liberty to send me whatever answer you thought best. If you do not set me free, write to me that you are the same sweet, affectionate Pauline for life whom I knew formerly, and that you will esteem yourself happy in being mine;—that moment I break off with all but yourself. I only ask you to say nothing about it for three days to any one on earth without a single exception; and in that case keep this letter, and let your answer be brought back to me. If your heart be given to another, or you entertain an insuperable aversion to me, at least appreciate my attention in sending you this letter: give the bearer your declaration setting me at liberty; I shall feel from the bottom of my heart that I have fulfilled all my duties to-

wards you, and shall be satisfied with myself. Farewell; I am—until I receive your answer, under whatever appellation you choose to give me—Mademoiselle, your very humble, &c.

"De Beaumarchais."

This first letter was not very engaging; it had been delivered to Pauline and withdrawn before she had time to answer it. Beaumarchais sent it back to her the same day, with a second one, which we subjoin.

"Friday Evening.

"I asked you to send me an answer in writing. You sent after my sister to ask her for the letter to which you promised a reply. She thought it best to withdraw it from you, and give it back to me. I now send it you again, begging that you will read it with attention, and give a formal answer to it. I wish very much that no one stood between you and myself, in order that I might be able to count on the truth of what you may state to me. I send you back your packet of letters. If you retain them, join mine to your reply. The perusal of your letters has had a great effect on me, and I do not wish to undergo so much pain another time. But before answering me, consider well what will be most advantageous, both as regards your fortune and your happiness. My object is, that, forgetting all that has occurred, we pass our days agreeably and tranquilly. Do not let the fear of having to live with any members of my family, who might not please you, interfere with your affection, if it has not been extinguished by a passion for some one else. My home will be so arranged, that whether it be you or any one else, my wife will always be mistress in my house. Your uncle burst out laughing when I complained that he was opposed to my union with you. He said, that in his opinion I had no occasion to fear a refusal, or otherwise that his niece must have lost her

senses. It is true that when I was on the point of giving you up for ever, I experienced an emotion which taught me that I cared more for you than I thought. What I ask from you, then, is asked in the best faith in the world. Do not flatter yourself that you will ever expose me to the chagrin of seeing you the wife of a certain man. He would require some daring to lift his eyes before the public, if he meditated the accomplishment of a twofold perfidy. Pardon me if I express myself with warmth. The thought never entered my head without making all my blood boil.*

"But whatever may be your decision, do not delay informing me of it, for I have suspended everything that I was engaged in, in order to give myself up once more to you. Your uncle has represented to me how little advantageous this marriage would be to me, but I am far from attending to any such considerations. I wish to leave you once more to yourself alone, or let everything be finished between us for life. I rely upon your keeping all this secret† from every one but your aunt. You can understand that I should have a dreadful cause of complaint against you if I discovered that you had not kept this secret. No one in the world suspects that I have written to you. I confess it would appear delightful to me if while all our enemies were slumbering, peace could be concluded between us. Read your letters again, and you will understand how, in the recesses of my heart, I found all those feelings which they originally created."

Pauline's answer is much more laconic and much

* The Chevalier de S—— again. Here, at all events, is something passionate, but it is the only bit of "Othello" I can find in all Beaumarchais' letters. The whole passage indicates that he had at the time a sincere desire to marry the young lady.

† What a desire for mystery! Does it proceed from uneasy vanity, or from some other cause? Upon this point the letters throw no light.

more intelligible than the two letters which have just been given. In her case there are no conflicting sentiments. She loves Beaumarchais no longer, and she loves some one else. This is very simple and very evident.

"I can only repeat to you Sir, what I said to your sister, that I have come to a decision, and shall not depart from it. Accordingly I thank you for your offer, and hope with all my heart you may marry some one who will make you happy. I shall hear of it with pleasure, as I shall of everything else which brings you good fortune. I have already assured your sister of this. My aunt and myself have also to tell you how vexed we are that you should show us such disregard as to speak very ill, in connexion with his conduct towards us, of a man whom we look upon as our friend. I know better than any one can, how wrong you are in saying that he is perfidious.* I again told your sister this morning, that a young lady who used to live with my aunt, was the cause of all that takes place now,† and that since that time I had been only kept back by the world. You have still several letters of mine, two of which were written at the time in question, another when I was at Fontainebleau, besides some others, which I beg you will

* The defence of the fortunate rival, in which Pauline, like a real daughter of Eve, as she is, makes her aunt take part, and speaks in the plural, must have been rather a difficult morsel for Beaumarchais to digest.

† Here Pauline is not, perhaps, very sincere in screening herself behind Mademoiselle Perrette. She alleges an old infidelity which had long since been forgiven; at the same time she asks for her letters of that period, but, as they are the most interesting, Beaumarchais takes care to forget to give them back.

send me. I shall request one of our friends from St. Domingo, as I have already informed you, to call upon you and conclude all that remains to be terminated between us.

"I am most perfectly, Sir,

"Your very humble and obedient servant,

"Le B——."

Pauline, who formerly concluded, "I am for life your faithful Pauline," now signs politely with her surname; and this correspondence terminates, like a great many others of the same kind, with "I have the honour to be your most obedient servant," after beginning with protestations of eternal love.

Finally, to finish the episode, comes Pauline's cousin, of whom I have spoken, and who at least dates his letter, which renders him estimable in the eyes of posterity. He has become reconciled with Beaumarchais' brother, and, while he makes conditions for his cousin, he at the same time says no more about the innocence of the Chevalier, which probably begins to strike him as less evident.

"All is finished, my dear Beaumarchais, and without hope: I have expressed your wishes to Madame G——, and Mademoiselle Le B——, and they are as anxious as you can be that the affair should be broken off in a quiet manner: the thing is, now, to regulate accounts between you and Mademoiselle Le B——, and make arrangements for repaying you the sum which will remain due to you. The ladies also beg that you will place in my hands all the papers you have in connexion with Mademoiselle Le B——. You cannot imagine

how distressed I am at not having been able to unite two hearts which had so long appeared to me to be made for one another: but *man proposes, and God disposes.* I flatter myself, that on both sides the justice, which I think I deserve, will be rendered to me. I have allowed you to read my heart, and you must have seen that I am a stranger to all artifice and deception. Adieu, my friend: I shall go to see you as soon as possible; in the meanwhile let me hear from you; I embrace you, and am always your sincere friend,

"P——.

"Evening of Shrove Tuesday, February 11, 1766."

Let us render this worthy cousin, whose sentences are "more consoling than new,"* the justice which he claims, and let us acknowledge that he had nothing to do with the Chevalier's perfidy. At all events, some months after the letter was written, while Julie's adorer married Pauline, Beaumarchais had the annoyance of seeing his former betrothed become Madame de S——, and thus cause him the chagrin of which he stood in so much dread, and the thought of which, as he told us, *made all the blood in his veins boil.*

If we were writing a novel, it would finish here, or it would end with the death of Beaumarchais, who would kill himself in despair; or with the death of the Chevalier, who would be sacrificed to the fury of his rival; but, as we are writing a true story, we are obliged, above everything, to be accurate in our

* Bilboquet's phrase in the burlesque comedy of the "Saltimbanques."—TRANS.

assertions, and to state that, instead of finishing with a suicide or a duel, the adventure terminated more prosaically with a settlement of accounts, in which the future author of the "Marriage of Figaro" presents rather a comic appearance in his double character of the lover who has been deceived, and the creditor who fears he will not be paid. I have laid so much stress upon the cold and calculating side of his attachment, that I feel myself bound to remind the reader that if he had shown an excess of prudence as regarded his affection, he had in his friendship been generous, even to prodigality. Not only had he advanced money to the aunt and niece, without keeping any particular account of it, but he had, it will be remembered, risked a rather heavy sum on the dilapidated estate in St. Domingo; this money was now lost, and the least that could be done by the man, who had taken Pauline away from him, was to put her accounts in order, if he did not pay them. Now that he has been sacrificed as a lover, Beaumarchais makes his appearance in the character of a strict creditor and expert calculator: he puts the capital and interest together, and brings in a bill, which he has drawn up with the most scrupulous accuracy. The Chevalier, who has not time to occupy himself with such low details, and has gone to spend the honey-moon somewhere or other with Pauline, sends to Beaumarchais his elder brother, the Abbé de S——, a highly respec-

table Abbé, but somewhat hasty and vexatious, who not only disputes Beaumarchais' bill, but sometimes allows himself to irritate a still bleeding wound, and to mix up the lover with the creditor. Hence arose very violent disputes, of which the following letter from Beaumarchais to the Abbé will suffice to give some idea :—

"Monsieur l'Abbé,—I beg you to remember that I have not been wanting in courtesy towards you, and that I owe nothing but contempt to the person whom you represent, as I have had the honour of telling you twenty times, and as I should have very much liked to tell him myself, if he had been as punctual in making his appearance as he has been clever in gaining his object. The proof that Mademoiselle Le B—— was willing to accept me, my affection, my advice, my money, is, that without your brother, who disturbed a union which had existed for six years, she would still be availing herself of all the services which I lavished upon her, as long as they were agreeable and useful to her. It is true that she has purchased these services very dearly, for it is to our friendship for your brother that she owes the happiness of having married him, which would not have been the case if he had remained, without knowing us, in the place where he was then vegetating. I am not in the secret of the expression, *apology;* accordingly, I must be excused from replying to it, and if I regret his absence, it is because I should do myself the pleasure on every occasion of telling him myself what he can now hear through a third person only. I shall not discontinue, by conferring benefits, to prepare myself for acts of injustice and atrocity. I have never suffered much from doing good in expectation of evil, and your advice will add nothing to my present inclinations in that respect.

"As you confess that you lose your temper with me, it would ill suit me to address any reproaches to you on the subject. It is sufficient that you should accuse yourself, for me to retain no feeling of resentment towards you.

"I do not know why you underline the words, 'your sister,' when you remind me that it was as such that I loved Mademoiselle B——. Does this sarcasm fall upon her, upon me, or upon your brother? This, however, as you please. Although Mademoiselle B——'s fate no longer concerns me, it would not become me, in speaking of her, to make use of any expressions but those which I have employed. I do not complain of her.* She is, as you say, young and without experience; and although she has very little property, your brother uses his experience advantageously in marrying her, and has indeed made a very good thing of it.

"Remember, once more, M. l'Abbé, that nothing I say about him at all applies to you. It would be too humiliating for a man of your cloth to be suspected of having had anything to do with your brother's conduct towards me: let him have all the blame himself, and do not take up things which are not entitled to so polite an advocate as yourself.

"I have the honour to be, &c.,

"Beaumarchais."

To put an end to these irritating debates, Beaumarchais made a considerable diminution in his claim, which was at last accepted at 24,441 livres, 4 sous, 4 deniers.

And now the shade of the charming Pauline must excuse me, but it appears certain that this claim, accepted and acknowledged by her, was never paid.

* Here, again, is an instance of that kind and delicate feeling which Beaumarchais often exhibits, and which ought to be observed.

Not only do I find it among other papers of a later date, classed with the debts which are looked upon as almost hopeless, but the touching solicitude of Gudin, the cashier, after the death of his master, for the shortest love-letter from Pauline, is sufficient to show that this debt must be ranked with the "acknowledgments not acted upon," traces of which are to be found in Beaumarchais' papers, from rather a large number of agreeable women, poets, and noble lords. It must be stated that Pauline became a widow about a year after her marriage, so that this calamity probably interfered with the arrangement of her affairs. The latest *souvenir* of Pauline I can find in the packet of letters, is in a letter addressed to her cousin, bearing the date of 1769, in which she says, with regard to Beaumarchais, "Let him rest in peace, he will be paid!" This is rather cool, in reference to a man one has loved a few moments *for life*. Did Pauline happen to think that her love, after all, was worth 24,441 livres, 4 sous, 4 deniers? It would be impossible to deny it; but as such an hypothesis might give to certain very *demonstrative* letters, a meaning which we need not look for in them, I hasten to put it aside as hastily formed, and I conclude, that if the young and beautiful Creole left the debt standing, it was in consequence of her St. Domingo estate being laid hold of by other creditors, or plundered by the blacks, or swallowed up by an earthquake.

Such is the exact story of the little drama in real life, under the influence of which Beaumarchais studied the art of writing dramas for the stage; for we are now in 1767, the year in which he made his first appearance in theatrical and literary life, as the author of "Eugénie."

CHAPTER VII.

THE DRAMA IN FRANCE IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY.—BEAUMARCHAIS' FIRST DRAMAS.—HIS SECOND MARRIAGE.

Serious dramatic writing not being exactly Beaumarchais' vocation, we feel, in the first instance inclined to ask ourselves how it happens that he wrote two serious dramas before giving himself up to his natural genius for comedy. While making allowances for certain touches of sentimentality in the Grandison style, which have already been observed in his letters, and which, overshadowed by the personal misadventure we have just related, may have contributed to the false direction in which he started, I think the mistake may, above all, be explained by an inclination which he had very strongly developed for everything which had the advantage or even the appearance of being novel. He was one of those men for whom novelty exercises an irresistible attraction, while in itself it inspires others with aversion. As we follow him through life we see him getting up

enthusiasm with the greatest ease, for all kinds of inventions of an industrial, mechanical, and scientific nature, from the merest charlatanism to aerostation, the progress of which occupied a great deal of his attention during his old age. A taste for innovation in everything is one of his most striking characteristics. Now, the domestic drama * which at present has lost the charm of novelty, was then appearing in France for the first time. This medium style between tragedy and comedy, introduced by La Chaussée and Diderot, much approved by some, much attacked by others, was without a precedent in our literature, and from that alone had a very natural charm for a mind inclined like his towards inventions. Let us add, that as regards execution this style presented

* *Drame*, for which we have no exact equivalent in English. The English domestic drama differs so far from the *drame* that it admits the introduction of comic scenes, which need have no greater relation to the subject of the piece than Molierè's interludes have to that of his comedies. The relation appears even less when we remember that Molierè's interludes have frequently a symbolical reference to the story, and serve to illustrate it in a fantastic form. The defenders of the domestic drama, as it at present exists in England, maintain that the comic scenes relieve the serious portions of the piece; but, at the same time, introduced as they are abruptly, and without regard to the general tone of the play, they shock a large portion of the audience. We would suggest that these violently comic scenes should be placed at the end of each act; this would increase their resemblance to the aforesaid interludes, and would, at the same time, enable the spectator to leave the theatre during their performance without losing any of the action of the drama.—TRANS.

more facilities than either of the two others, and it will be understood that before thinking of leaving his work in comedy, by revivifying its form, and extending its sphere, Beaumarchais, without troubling himself much about his real aptitude, rushed with his usual enthusiasm towards the domestic drama—a drama of every-day life, which seemed to him an unknown world, whose Columbus was Diderot, and whose Vespuccio he hoped himself to become.

If it be true, as M. de Bonald has said, that literature is the expression of society, and it is above all true as regards dramatic literature,* we cannot be astonished at the dramatic productions of the seventeenth century having been insufficient for the century which followed.

The marked distinction between the style and

* "Dramatic literature," says M. Ampère, "has the especial property of making known the moral and social condition of a time or people; it is less affected than any other kind by individual caprices. A writer, when he composes a piece of verse, can, up to a certain point, escape the impress of his century, and represent according to his own fancy an imaginary and sometimes exceptional world; but that which an assemblage of many men have to see together must necessarily be adapted to their mode of feeling—the dramatist and the public are before and in contact with one another: the latter acts on the former as the audience acts upon the orator." The same idea is expressed by M. de Tocqueville, in his fine work on "Democracy in America"—"When a revolution, which has changed the social and political condition of a people begins to show itself in its literature, it generally makes its first *appearance in the drama*, where its effects can always be perceived."

character of tragedy and comedy, the choice of the subjects treated, the mode of conducting the action, all combined to make dramatic literature of the period a faithful mirror, which bore the reflection of a polished state of society, governed by strict rules, and influenced in matters of taste by the aristocracy of the court. As the aristocratic influence gradually becomes weaker, as the distance between the different classes becomes less marked, as the intellect of the nation tends more and more, up to a certain point, towards a general level, this change manifests itself in the drama by the attempt to introduce new subjects and new combinations. While Voltaire and afterwards Ducis endeavour to modify the old tragedy without destroying it, other more audacious opponents, such as La Chaussée, Diderot, Sedaine, Beaumarchais, and Sébastien Mercier, aim at the production of a new style, under the titles of "Sentimental Comedy," "Domestic Tragedy," "Serious Comedy," or "Drama of Every-day Life," which in the first instance was of rather mean proportions, but which afterwards acquired more extension, and became, finally, what we now call *le drame*, that is to say, taking the word in its general acceptation, a dramatic composition, in prose or verse, not governed by the severe rules of the ancient dramatic art.

This dramatic school of the eighteenth century has produced numerous works, and already nearly all

of them are dead; three only are still acted, "Le Philosophe sans le Savoir," by Sédaine, and two of the three dramas written by Beaumarchais; "Eugenie," played sometimes, though very rarely, and the "Mère Coupable," which still holds its place. However, if the school has been barren in lasting productions, it cannot be considered to have been without importance, as its theories, and above all, its criticisms, have ended in great results.

The movement which took place in dramatic literature in France, between 1820 and 1830, and to which the name of "Romantic" was applied, is neither so new, nor so completely English or German as is generally supposed. It had its precursor in the eighteenth century; and in the theories of Diderot, in the "Essay on Dramatic Construction" by Sébastien Mercier, published in 1773, and in the disputes raised by the first general translation of Shakspere in 1776, it is easy to see, allowing for some differences in the theory, that everything which was written against the ancient tragedy, had been said and re-said in the eighteenth century. It can be seen that if this first movement, which between 1789 and 1815 was absorbed by the political agitation and military events of this period, afterwards acquired more extension from the influence of the foreign drama, it had in the first instance itself exercised an influence on the drama of other countries. Thus,

Lessing, whom the Germans look upon as an Arminius delivering their stage from the invasion of French Tragedy, became a passionate admirer of the theories of Diderot, from whom he has translated more than one page in his work on "Dramatic Construction." We also see that Göthe set much value on the anti-classic observations of Mercier, and that the majority of the works of Diderot's school have been translated and acted with success in England and Germany.

Nevertheless, we must not exaggerate, as some writers have done, the importance of the "Romantic" movement in the drama, during the eighteenth century. Mediocre in its productions, it is mean in its theories. Instead of declaring in favour of a system of liberty, regulated by certain principles, excluding nothing, and endeavouring to turn the beauties of the ancient school to account, the dramatic innovators of the eighteenth century invented a narrow, poor, miserable theory, as exclusive as the old one, but possessing neither its elevation nor its grandeur. The *bourgeois*, annoyed at not having been admitted to the honours of the serious drama, and at having been looked upon as game for comic authors, appear to have desired a kind of tragedy for themselves, in which they could play the principal parts in their own way; sometimes even with a title of "M. le Marquis," or "M. le Commandeur,"

and from which everything belonging to another sphere than their own should be excluded. Such is the general explanation of all the theories, and all the dramas founded upon them, which appeared in the eighteenth century.*

To devote only a few words to the theories of Diderot, whom Beaumarchais proclaims to be his master, their object was to introduce into the realms of tragedy, a species of composition which he terms Domestic Tragedy, and which was intended to depict the misfortunes of the *bourgeois*, while into the realms of comedy, properly so called, serious comedy was to be introduced, which appears to me, apart from a

* One work alone, which, moreover, was not written for the theatre, stands out from this mass of domestic dramas, and appears in the year 1747, as the embryo of what we now call the Historical Drama. We speak of "François II.," by the President Hénault, which seems to have been suggested by reading a bad translation of Shakspere's drama of Henry VI. This work, which went beyond the ideas of the period, was not appreciated. Grimm, who was so enthusiastic an admirer of Diderot's dramas, speaks with disdain of "François II.," which he incorrectly terms an historical tragedy. One critic alone, of whom we must not form our opinions from the invectives of Voltaire, and who was deficient in neither intelligence nor appreciative power—namely, Fréron, speaks of the President Hénault's historical drama, in prose, as "a theatrical production of a singular description, which cannot be classed with the prose tragedies of La Motte, and which, without being couched in the true language of Melpomene, and written in accordance with the unities, nevertheless possesses a general interest and well regulated action." Fréron adds, that this work appears likely to be the origin of a new dramatic method—which was perfectly true.

few differences, to be the same thing as Domestic Tragedy. Diderot, without expressing himself so distinctly as Beaumarchais, seems in general to be of opinion that dramas should be written in prose rather than in verse; and finally, as regards the two most essential questions, that of the unities and of the combination of the serious with the comic, this pretended innovator declares very distinctly in favour of the former, and explains himself very vaguely with regard to the latter point; so that while depriving the serious drama of all its ideal beauty, of all the grandeur and elevation of high tragedy, Diderot at the same time leaves it with all those shackles of which he complains in his best known criticisms.

In support of his theories, Diderot wrote two dramas, the "Fils naturel," and the "Père de famille." If we except a few happy expressions, a certain pathos which sometimes rises to eloquence, and a rather successful character (that of the Commander in the "Père de famille"), there are few dramatic productions more confused, more feeble in plot, more heavy, more fatiguing by the continued emphasis of the style—by the abuse of interjections, apostrophes, and violent tirades, than these two dramas, which are almost unreadable.*

* It is rather astonishing to find a man of wit, like Grimm, informing the world that the "Fils Naturel" is a sublime work, destined to produce a great revolution. "Works of genius," he says,

At the end of a conversation with Diderot, Voltaire said of him, "This man is not made for dialogue." The justice of Voltaire's remark is seen in every page of his dramas; none of the characters, neither Suplice, nor Constance, nor Dorval, nor Germeuil, nor Saint-Alban speak: it is always Diderot, the philosopher, giving us a dissertation on love, celibacy, convents, virtue, and social equality. This writer, who is sometimes so witty in his "Salons,*" and his letters to Mademoiselle Voland; who, in his dramatic theories often exhibits a feeling, which, in its simplicity, is worthy of the ancient Greek; who, coming after Fenelon, points out, with much success, the exaggerations in the language of Corneille's heroes; this

"have a characteristic stamp by which it is difficult not to recognise them. They fill the mind and heart with a genial warmth, which becomes communicated from one person to another, until at last they affect an entire nation, which receives impressions that are sometimes destined to be eternal; thus, a single man, appearing in the midst of darkness, will dissipate it by his genius alone—will enlighten and quicken his century, and elevate the people to a point of intellectual perfection which, without him, it never would have reached, or, at all events, not until after centuries of labour and research. Accordingly, no work of genius ever appeared without producing some revolution. M. Diderot has just produced a work which has had the very effect on the public of which I have spoken." Grimm wrote this in 1757, ("Correspondance Litteraire"). Who in the present day, unless he be a professor or a critic, and as such obliged to read everything, is acquainted with the "Fils naturel"?

* His notices of the Salons, or Annual Exhibitions of Painting.—TRANS.

critic, in fine, who is so ready to perceive the motes of the great tragic authors of the seventeenth century, is by no means conscious of his own beam. The young and virtuous Dorval, for instance—conversing with the young and virtuous Constance, hesitating whether he shall marry her, lest he should have children, who might become the victims of fanaticism—delivers a fine speech on the subject, which commences thus: "Constance, I am by no means a stranger to that inclination, so general and so sweet, which affects all living creatures, which leads them to perpetuate their species," &c. In another work, by the same author, a story in dialogue, entitled "Mankind: a Representation of Human Want,"—a poor woman says to her husband, "We have no more wood, to repair the small amount of natural heat left to us by an irritated heaven." This is what Diderot called "introducing nature into the dialogue."

After Diderot, and before Beaumarchais, an intellect endowed with qualities rarely found together, above all in the eighteenth century—an intellect uniting delicacy, perception, judgment, and naïveté, with an ingenuity which is always agreeable and sometimes profound, Sedaine, in fact, though he never wrote any theory on the subject, had already drawn from the style pointed out, but badly defined by the author of the "Fils naturel," all this style of dramatic literature was capable of producing. In 1765 he

produced, with the greatest success, "Le Philosophe sans le savoir," the only really remarkable work belonging to the school of Diderot; accordingly the latter said with candour, in speaking of Sedaine, "This man has cut the ground from under me." In truth, the simple, graceful, sympathetic drama of Sedaine, destroyed the sententious, inflated, confused dramas of Diderot.

We have now reached the moment at which Beaumarchais enters upon his literary career—in 1767, at thirty-five years of age, after he had had an experience of life in all its aspects. He was at this time convinced, wrongly enough, that his capabilities fitted him for the serious style, of which he, in his turn, writes a theory in the preface to the drama of "Eugénie." This theory is, for the most part, borrowed from that of Diderot, for whom the author of "Eugénie" professes the most lively admiration. It is couched in a style both less warm and less correct than that of Diderot, but with more precision, clearness, and method. He makes the principal points more evident, without adopting the too subtle distinctions between the four dramatic styles as laid down by his master. Beaumarchais advocates strongly the introduction of serious drama, "which," he says, "is a middle point between heroic tragedy and amusing comedy." He was, I think, the first of the dramatic writers of the

period who called his piece a drama.* The drama, according to him, should be written in prose; its objects should be the representation of situations taken from common life; "the dialogue should be simple, and as natural as possible; real eloquence must be that which springs from situations, and the only colouring which can be allowed to it is the animated, hurried, broken, agitated, and true language of the passions." Diderot maintained the three unities; his disciple says nothing about them, nor does he speak of the mixture of the comic with the tragic. That this sort of composition, which Beaumarchais represents as superior to tragedy and comedy, has its merit, may be true; but it must be ranked below tragedy, and below genuine drama and comedy. The popularity which this domestic drama has since acquired, proves that it was suited to our manners and tastes; but we cannot help noticing, as characteristic of the age, the exaggerated importance which the author of "Eugénie" attaches to so meagre a dramatic conception—destined, as he seemed to think, to eclipse all others. In the first place, it is rather amusing to see Beaumarchais always full of the present moment, never suspecting for an instant what is his real vocation; when he labours to prove that the "amusing style," or comedy, is much less interesting

* The two dramas by Diderot, and the one by Sedaine, were still called comedies.

than the serious style;" that the moral effect of the "amusing style," is either very slight or altogether absent, and even sometimes the reverse of what it ought to be; in a word, that comedy, by its very nature, is essentially immoral, which does not prevent him, seventeen years afterwards, from taking up the contrary argument in his preface to the "Marriage of Figaro," and endeavouring to prove that the "amusing style," as exhibited in his piece, is above all essentially moral. Of the "heroic style," that is to say, tragedy, Beaumarchais has a very small opinion; in his remarks on the Antique theatre, we discover the prosaic and slightly vulgar side of his mind, very inferior to Diderot on this point; he can only perceive in the Greek drama the principle of fatality, which shocks him; he can neither distinguish the majestic and harmonious beauty of the principal figures, nor the admirable expression of the sentiments of the human heart. The word "classic," which he employs, perhaps for the first time, in an ironical sense, seems to him, as M. Sainte Beuve has acutely remarked, synonymous with "barbarous;" thus he will say, if any one is "barbarous," "classic enough to maintain the negative," &c. Beaumarchais is equally wrong as regards dramatic allusion; and here, as in many other things, he is completely carried away by the ideas of his century. The preceding century could only understand kings and heroes taking a part

in their serious drama. The author of "Eugénie" denies heroes and kings the right to appear in his "serious drama;" according to him they do not excite a true interest: their misfortunes occurring in an altogether exceptionable manner, produce no effect on the feelings of the audience. "It is our vanity alone," he says, "which derives a gratification from being initiated in the secrets of a magnificent court; the spectator is, above all, touched by the misfortunes of a person situated in the same sphere of life as himself;" that is to say, a tradesman who files his schedule, is a more dramatic subject than a fallen monarch, or a warrior who has just lost a battle.

After excluding heroes and kings, Beaumarchais, naturally enough, excludes the great events of history; and among other arguments in support of his system, he gives some very strange ones, which prove very little more than one thing—that in 1767 he was no prophet. "What," he inquires, "are the revolutions of Athens and Rome to me? the peaceful subject of a monarchical state in the eighteenth century; why does the account of the earthquake, which swallowed up Lima and its inhabitants, three thousand leagues away, move my pity, when that of the judicial murder of Charles I., committed in London, only excites my indignation? the reason is, that the volcano that burst forth in Peru, might also have broken out in Paris, and have buried me in ruins; that it perhaps

threatens me even now; while, on the other hand, I can never apprehend anything precisely similar to the unheard of misfortune of the English king."

The same error, with regard to scenic allusion, which makes the author of "Eugénie" limit the realm of the drama, and reduce it to being merely a servile copy of the most common realities, induces him to prefer prose to verse; perhaps, also, his motive for objecting to verse, is taken involuntarily from the fable of the Fox and the Grapes. It is a remarkable fact, indeed, that almost all those who have attacked poetry, from Fenelon, who, in his letter to the Academy, lays a great stress upon the disadvantages of rhyme, to Diderot and Beaumarchais, all brought to the question the partiality of the goldsmith, or rather of the man who is not a goldsmith.* They always wrote in prose, and accordingly attacked those who wrote in verse.† The most audacious dramatic innovators of our day, while endeavouring, with more or less success, to dethrone the majestic Alexandrine of our tragedies, are, at the same time, all unanimous, and justly so, in advocating the use of verse in dramatic compositions. "It is one of the most powerful

* An allusion to Molière's "M. Josse" in "l'Amour Medecin," who, being a goldsmith, has an unlimited belief in the efficacy of jewellery under all possible circumstances.—TRANS.

† La Motte is perhaps the only exception; he was an advocate for prose, and the best thing he has written is a tragedy in verse.

dykes," wrote M. Hugo in 1829, "against the commonplace, which, like democracy, is always on the point of overflowing. . . . . An idea steeped in verse, becomes suddenly more incisive and more brilliant; the iron becomes steel." Nothing can be more just; and Montaigne was of the same opinion when he said, in a style not less richly coloured, "I like poetry of a particular kind; for as the voice, when constrained within the narrow tube of a trumpet, comes out with increased force and effect, so a sentence, when compressed into poetical feet, breaks upon me more abruptly, and strikes me with a more sudden shock."

The theories of Diderot and Beaumarchais on the drama, present some interest, as giving birth to a more extended system, which, without doing all it promised, at least restored some vitality to our theatre; but these theories are still far—as the reader has seen—from answering to the idea we have of a grand, varied, free, dramatic system, regulated only by good sense, in which the author takes his inspiration at will from history, poetry, or common life, and embraces, as M. Guizot says, "all social conditions—all general or individual feeling, the simultaneous union or opposition of which constitute the whole of human life."*

The drama of "Eugénie" gives evidence of the

* "Shakespeare and his Time," p. 178 in the original.

littleness of the author's doctrines; there are some weak parts in it, the colour of which is absolutely faded. Whether as regards the action or the dialogue, this work is in my opinion very superior to the dramas of Diderot; without having the naïvete so clear and yet so full of colour, which we see in Sedaine, Beaumarchais, professing, like Diderot, the "natural" theory, at all events puts the theory into practice with more success. Fréron, who otherwise writes severely about this drama, acknowledges himself, that the dialogue of the three first acts is characterised by precision and truthfulness. Already Beaumarchais shows a vein of facility, animation, and clearness, which resists the invasion of emphatic and over sentimental writing. However, as "Eugénie" is far from being a masterpiece, our business here is not so much to analyse the piece in detail, as to make a study of the author, as seen in the work itself, or in the energetic and varied means to which he had to resort, in order to insure its success.

His natural opposition to social distinctions, which in Beaumarchais' case had been increased by the numerous annoyances of which we have sufficiently spoken, is already shown in the drama of "Eugénie," the manuscript of which exhibited so much audacity, that it had to be considerably modified by the censorship. The reader may be aware that in the piece, as it is acted and published, the scene is laid

in England or in London. Eugénie, daughter of a Welsh gentleman, thinks she has married Lord Clarendon, the nephew of the Minister at War, who has shamefully deceived her by a false marriage, in which his steward has played the part of chaplain, and who is on the point of marrying a rich heiress, just as his victim arrives in London. The subject is somewhat singular; but as in England marriages do not necessitate so many formalities as in France, it is not absolutely inadmissible: an analogous fact forms the climax of Goldsmith's "Vicar of Wakefield;" but, in the first instance, Beaumarchais had not laid the first scene of his drama in England. It was in France, in Paris, and in the eighteenth century. In the manuscript, Lord Clarendon was called the Marquis de Rosempré; he is also made the nephew of the Minister of War, and has deceived, through a sham marriage, and with the assistance of a servant who is disguised as a priest, the virtuous daughter of the Baron de Kerbalec, a Breton nobleman. The fact thus presented is rather offensive, very improbable, and altogether the censorship rendered a service to the drama itself by forcing the author to lay the scene in England. The original manuscript, however, altered only a few days before the representation, was the one used at the numerous readings which Beaumarchais gave of his first work, in order to prepare its success. And among all

the noblemen who were present at these readings, there is only one, the Duke de Nivernois, who very politely objects to the improbable infamy of the sham marriage. I have just said that Beaumarchais was working as hard as possible to insure a success. We have not yet reached 1784, the time of the "Marriage of Figaro;" when the author has only to restrain the feverish impatience of the public, which expects his piece as one of the most extraordinary events. It is 1767; Beaumarchais is completely unknown as a writer; he is a man of business and of pleasure, who has managed to push himself forward at court, who is spoken of in various ways, and whom the men of letters are disposed to receive as the courtiers received him, that is to say, as an intruder. Hence it was necessary for him to excite the public curiosity, to nurture it, and to look for followers and supporters in every rank; this he does with all that facility and diversity of talent which distinguish him; when, for instance, he wishes to read his drama to the Princesses, he assumes the character of a courtier who condescends to occupy himself with literature, in the interest of virtue and morals; he attributes to himself, beforehand, a celebrity which he has not obtained, and altogether exhibits extraordinary presumption.

"Mesdames,—The French company are going to represent, in a few days, a theatrical piece of a new description, for

which the whole of Paris is looking out with the most lively impatience. In spite of the orders which I gave to the actors, on making them a present of the piece, to keep the name of the author a profound secret, they have thought, in their misplaced enthusiasm, to render me a service by neglecting my instructions, and have quietly divulged my name to all the world. As this work, the offspring of my emotions, breathes the most ardent love of virtue, and tends to purify our theatre, by making it a school of good morals, I thought, before making it further known to the public, I was bound to offer it as a secret homage to my illustrious patronesses. Accordingly, Mesdames, I beg to be allowed to read it to you in private. After that, when the public, at the representation, will exalt me to the clouds, the greatest success of my drama will be that of having been honoured by your tears, as its author has always been by your benefits."

With the Duke of Orleans, grandfather of Louis Philippe, a prince who loved and appreciated men of letters, Beaumarchais was more modest.

"Monseigneur," he writes, "owing to the illness of Préville, which delays the representation of 'Eugénie,' the new drama, in five acts, for another week, I shall be enabled to pay your Highness the homage of reading it to you, if you should be at all anxious for it. I know, Monseigneur, that you have heard enough against the author and against the work; the fomer is an object of too little importance for me to be guilty of the indiscretion of speaking of him; I confine myself to endeavouring to give you more exact notions about the latter, which many persons have attacked, although few are acquainted with it. You will be less astonished, Monseigneur, at my boldness in begging you beforehand to be my judge, when you know that the piece runs the risk of

being stopped at the representation, and that fifty louis have been distributed to fifty scoundrels, to go to the pit and insure its failure, without hearing it, on the night of its first representation. The Duke de Noailles said to me about it yesterday, 'So much the better: it proves that they have a good opinion of it;' but it makes me tremble, and I behave like an unfortunate wretch persecuted unjustly in this world. I raise my hands to heaven, and seek justice and protection from the gods. Perhaps I shall gain a double advantage from my step, and the drama, which was an amusement to me in the midst of more serious occupations, and which does more honour to the goodness of my heart, than to the power of my mind, will make your Highness form a better opinion of me than you can have formed from the statements of others, and will induce you to receive with favour the assurance of the profound respect with which I have the honour to be,

"Your Highness's, &c.,

"BEAUMARCHAIS."

With the Duke de Noailles, to whom he had read his piece, and who had exhibited some interest in him, Beaumarchais takes the part of a statesman who has missed his vocation.

"It is only by stealth, M. le Duc, that I have ventured to devote myself to literature; when for one moment I cease to rake the ground and cultivate the garden of my advancement, the earth becomes suddenly covered with weeds, and I have to begin again; another of my follies, from which I have been forced to separate myself, is the study of politics, thorny and repulsive to most persons, but as attractive as it is useless to me. I loved it to madness; I have read, written, travelled, observed, I have done everything for its sake; the rights of nations, the privileges of kings by whom the mass of men are always moved; the action and re-action of one government

upon another, were all studies of peculiar interest to my mind. There is, perhaps, no one who has experienced, so much as myself, the annoyance of being obliged to take a large view of everything, and at the same time remain the smallest of men. Sometimes I have even been so far as to murmur, in the unjustness of my temper, that fate did not place me in more advantageous circumstances with regard to things for which I seemed to be fitted, above all, when I considered that kings and ministers in intrusting their agents with missions, were quite unable to bestow upon them that grace which was conferred by the ancient apostles; and which made enlightened and sublime men out of persons of the feeblest intellect."

Beaumarchais had also been able to enlist, on behalf of "Eugénie," the daughter of the Duke de Noailles, the Countess of Tessé, a witty and amiable person, who had discussed the character of the heroine with him, and to whom he writes with a rather heterogeneous mixture of romantic subtlety, and somewhat impertinent gallantry, which again appears to be a characteristic of the man and the age.

"I felt, Madame la Comtesse, your politeness very much, so far it is removed from the barren, ceremonious civility of which we see so much, and which is a very weak imitation of the politeness of the mind from which all true civility springs:

"Qu'il est facile à la grandeur,
D'imposer des lois à notre âme!
Un coup-d'œil soumet notre cœur,
Une politesse l'enflamme.*

* How easy is it for greatness
To impose laws upon us!
A glance subjects our heart,
An act of politeness inflames it."

"Let us now argue about your remarks. I have turned them over in my head, and if I remain attached (forgive me for it) to the situation in which I make Eugénie say that she despises herself for loving a perfidious person, but that if she has the courage to despise him living, nothing can prevent her from lamenting him dead; if I remain attached to it, I say I do so because all my efforts to agree with you have been unable to dissuade me from the belief that the magnanimity shown in the repentance, and public and free avowal of a fault, not only overcomes the evil, but also the shame of the confession. Distressed, tortured, by a passion which she detests, what does Eugénie teach me by her confession? That she appears to have two souls: one which is weak, always carnal, devoted to her seducer; and the other one sublime, elevated, entirely spiritual, despising and overcoming the former, accusing it and covering it publicly with shame. The effect of this struggle is certain: it must kill Eugénie, it must entirely destroy the weak human machine, which is the theatre of this conflict of passions; it will do so, she will feel all the pangs of death, but the sublime soul never yields to the affectionate soul—there you have my heroine! I hope this commentary, which is, perhaps, more confused than the text, will explain the matter to you. But such are the metaphysics of the heart, that the more we attempt to explain them, the further we get from that rapid and just perception which we are enabled to gain by the first glance.

"I am, Madame la Comtesse, &c.,

"BEAUMARCHAIS."

Amongst the support which Beaumarchais was anxious to get beforehand, he attached a great importance, and with reason, to that of the Duke de Nivernois, a man of the highest position, possessing

at the same time a delicate, graceful wit, himself a successful cultivator of literature, and a member of the French Academy. Accordingly his good wishes were of much value to a person who was just beginning his literary career. The author of "Eugénie" had read his drama to him, and then asked, very humbly, for the Duke's opinion. We will give the Duke's answer; it bears the stamp of that graceful urbanity, the tradition of which has perhaps been somewhat lost by our grands seigneurs—if any grands seigneurs can still be said to exist.

"January 20, 1767.

"I am much flattered, Sir," he writes to him, "by the confidence with which you kindly honour me. I should only be abusing it if I dared to communicate to you, such suggestions as might occur to me after reading it only once. If you think that the reflections of a person with my long experience can be of any good to you, you should have the kindness to send me your manuscript, so that I may be able to read it alone attentively, without anything to take my attention away. But, Sir, I must tell you, not from modesty, but sincerely, that I do not consider myself very worthy of being consulted; and that, in making suggestions to you, of the little value of which I am conscious, I have no other intention but that of replying to your politeness, and to the confidence which you have been pleased to place in me. I have the honour, to be, Sir, &c.,

"The Duke de Nivernois."

The author sent his manuscript, which came back to him two days afterwards, with several pages of delicate and judicious criticism on the situa-

tions, characters, and style of the piece. Beaumarchais did not take advantage of all the remarks: he would have had to re-write the whole piece six days before the first performance; but the observations of the Duke de Nivernois were very useful to him: they pointed out beforehand the weak points of the piece, upon which criticism was likely to be directed. First of all, the Duke combats the idea of a sham marriage by means of a servant disguised as a chaplain—the crime being improbable in France, and incapable of representation on the stage. He proposed to substitute various details, so as to render the situation of Eugénie excusable—that constituting the principal interest of the piece. Unfortunately, a general remodelling of the piece would have been necessary, and Beaumarchais, being also attacked by the censorship, at last decided to change the scene to England. The principal fault of the drama of "Eugénie"—a fault over which we shall see Grimm rejoicing in triumph, abusing at the same time both the piece and author, is well laid hold of by the Duke de Nivernois. "I must confess," he says, "that I have the greatest possible difficulty in understanding the part of the Marquis, (the seducer, who before the performance was made Lord Clarendon). In the first act he behaves like a confirmed scoundrel; with deliberation and without remorse, he has deceived a young lady of family by a sham marriage; he leaves

her hopelessly compromised, wishing to marry some one else; and this is the man who is to obtain Eugénie's pardon, who is to be excused, and even to inspire interest! A great deal of preparation is necessary, in order to make this probable." And the Duke de Nivernois indicates the kind of preparation which was necessary: in that, indeed, lay the whole problem. It was required to find the means of rendering a seducer of the kind in question sufficiently interesting for a person of Eugénie's distinction, elevation, and delicacy of feeling, to love him, and even pardon him, after the discovery of his crime, without her character appearing unnatural. Beaumarchais had not sufficiently understood this difficulty; at the suggestion of the Duke de Nivernois he added a few touches to the character of the seducer—strengthened his hesitation, remorse, and added to the extenuating circumstances, which were before scarcely indicated; but the drama was always defective in this respect; and the business of Clarendon endeavouring to the very last moment to deceive Eugénie, who thinks she is his wife, whilst he is on the point of contracting a second marriage, rendered the reconciliation scene impossible.

The criticisms of the Duke de Nivernois on the subject of style were more useful to the author of "Eugénie." I see, when I compare the manuscript with the printed piece, that Beaumarchais had the

good sense to attend to them in a very docile manner. Persons moving in a good position had to be put on the stage; it was necessary the style should be natural, but never trivial; it was not to be stilted, on the other hand. Now, the medium between vulgarity and affectation is not, as is known, the prevailing quality in Beaumarchais' highly animated style; for instance, in the manuscript, where Eugénie complains that the Marquis de Rosempré (or Lord Clarendon) does not arrive, her aunt had to reply to her, "His duties do not allow him to leave the court at your *coup de sonnette.*" * The Duke de Nivernois protests against the *coup de sonnette;* Beaumarchais hastens, with reason, to suppress it. In another part, the aunt, who is rather an abrupt personage, hears the step of her brother, Eugénie's father, who is not less impetuous than his sister, and says, "You can recognise my *tonnerre de frère* by the noise he makes coming in."† "You might," writes the Duke, "leave out this expression, which is, to say the least, hazardous;" and Beaumarchais accordingly gives up his "*tonnerre de frère.*" Elsewhere, the aunt, irritated with her brother, who has just loaded Eugénie with bitter reproaches, apostrophised him as follows: "Courage, man of the woods, lose all restraint, hurry on, take a knife, slay your child!" "If we were to remove 'this knife,'" writes the Duke de Nivernois blandly,

* Literally, "at your ring." † Literally, my "thunder of a brother."

"I should also cut out the 'man of the woods,' who is a species of monkey little fitted for the honours of an apostrophe." Not only does Beaumarchais make the excisions pointed out to him, but softens considerably the whole scene, which was too much forced. Out of the numerous criticisms, in detail, of which I have only called attention to a very small portion, one alone is not accepted by Beaumarchais; the Duke de Nivernois objects to the word *guet-apens*, which he declares to be antiquated. Beaumarchais defends it, and he is right, for it is the only one which gives the idea he wishes to express; and the word, moreover, is not antiquated.

If Beaumarchais received with attention the observations of a Duke, who was a man of wit and literary attainments, he was equally unwilling to submit to the censorship, which, it is true, is more alarmed by boldness of thought than by negligence of style. After having combated with it for some time, the very day of the first representation of "Eugénie," he received a letter from the censor, who had had the misfortune to let an enormity escape him, "which," he says, "the *magistrate* (*i.e.* the Lieutenant-General of Police) perceived." Perhaps the censor is here concealing himself behind the "magistrate," who had probably not much time to read the piece of an unknown author, as Beaumarchais then was. This censor is a man who is destined one day to receive at the hands of the author

of "Eugénie" the most disagreeable celebrity. It was Marin, the famous Marin of the Goëzman lawsuit, who, to judge from the letter of which we have just spoken, was at that time living on very good terms with his future enemy. All that the Censor could get from Beaumarchais was a slight alteration in a phrase which he had underlined as dangerous—"The reign of natural justice begins, when that of civil justice can extend no further." The author modified the passage as follows: "Natural justice asserts her rights wherever civil justice is unable to extend her own." The meaning remains the same, and the sentence rather gained in construction.

At last Beaumarchais made his first appearance before the public; his drama was played for the first time, not on the 25th of June, as has been stated erroneously in every edition of his works, but on the 29th of January, 1767, as is proved by his correspondence, and from this passage of Fréron's "Année Littéraire:" "'Eugénie,' played for the first time on the 29th January of the present year, was somewhat ill received by the public, and the reception had altogether even the appearance of a failure. It was brought out again with brilliant success, owing to certain suppressions and corrections. It occupied the public attention for a long time, and the success does great honour to our actors."* The reader sees

* Année Littéraire, 1767, vol. viii. p. 309.

it is also through error that the statement has been made that Beaumarchais' *début* was unsuccessful. Without comparing the two pieces, the same thing happened to "Eugénie" which afterwards happened to the "Barber of Seville." The two last acts endangered for an instant the success of the three first. In these two last acts, the author, taking almost literally the subject of a story in Le Sage's "Diable Boiteux" (*le Comte de Belflor*), brought Eugénie's brother down from the clouds, made him saved from destruction by the seducer of his sister, and obliged afterwards to challenge him; so that his presence almost formed the commencement of a new piece, which was both confused and lengthy. Between the first and second representation Beaumarchais made great improvements in the two last acts; they still remained feeble, but the change was sufficient to throw the three first acts into relief, and these contained many fine scenes, and announced already a rare talent for grouping and dialogue. The third act in particular was very dramatic, and produced a great effect. The distinction, dignity, and pathos of a young and charming actress, Mademoiselle Doligny, who took the part of Eugénie, contributed not a little to save the piece, and to produce the triumph which it obtained with so much brilliancy over the danger which had threatened it at the first representation.*

* It was also Mademoiselle Doligny who eight years afterwards

The author of "Eugénie" gained his suit, then, with the public; but he met with more severity from the critics of the day, who seemed in general to have been rather ill-disposed to this new comer. "This work," says Grimm, speaking of "Eugénie," "is M. de Beaumarchais' first attempt in literature and the drama. This M. de Beaumarchais is, it is said, a man of about forty" (he was only 35), "wealthy, the holder of a small office at court, who has hitherto played the part of a *petit-maître*, and who has now taken a fancy—which is rather out of place—to play that of author. I have not the honour of knowing him, but I am assured that his self-sufficiency and conceit are remarkable." Elsewhere Grimm says, in reference to Beaumarchais' second drama, and in allusion to his origin, "It would

created, with much success, the part of Rosina in the "Barber of Seville." Beaumarchais had reserved the part of the Countess Almaviva, in the "Marriage of Figaro," for her; but she retired from the stage in 1783, leaving behind her the recollection of the most charming talent, and (what was rare then, without becoming very common now), an irreproachable moral reputation, which is confirmed by all contemporary testimony. It is well known that the austere Fréron was sent to For l'Evêque for having contrasted, rather maliciously, the well-known respectability of Mademoiselle Doligny with the levities of Mademoiselle Clairon. Beaumarchais had much esteem and affection for Mademoiselle Doligny, and I have found several letters from her, written in a style of great distinction, and which perfectly confirm the idea we generally entertain of her. Beaumarchais writes in the character of an affectionate, good natured friend, without any signs of gallantry. This graceful actress married an esteemed writer, M. Dudoyer.

have been much better to make good watches than to buy a place at court, assume airs, and write bad pieces." The tone of this is by no means sympathetic; and it must be acknowledged that if Beaumarchais had a reputation for conceit, he had not exactly stolen it; but Grimm, the most presumptuous of men, who put on white and rouge like an old coquette, and who, though no less a plebeian than the author of "Eugénie," called himself the Baron de Grimm,* as boldly as possible—Grimm, reproaching Beaumarchais with his self-sufficiency and his plebeian origin, is as amusing an exhibition as that of Diderot pretending to restore nature to the stage in the dialogue of the "Père de famille." The observations of Grimm on the drama of "Eugénie" are otherwise not wanting either in sense or wit, but they proceed from a man who is determined to slaughter the piece and its author. His prophecy with regard to Beaumarchais is worth being preserved: "This man," he says, "will never do anything even mediocre. In the whole piece there is only one point which pleases me—it is in the fifth act, where Eugénie, recovering from a long fainting fit, opens her eyes and finds Clarendon at her feet; she

* Grimm had, indeed, obtained the diploma of a Baron of the Holy Empire; but had not Beaumarchais a diploma also, as King's Secretary? It appears to us that the two titles were of about equal value.

throws herself back, and cries out, 'I thought I saw him!' This is so good, it stands out so strongly from the rest,* that I wager it is not the author's." What an equitable judge is this Grimm! The only thing now to explain is, how this marked contempt for a drama of the Diderot school, and one which was more interesting than those of the master, could be reconciled with the ridiculous admiration which Grimm expressed for the "Fils naturel." The fact, alas! is easily explained: Diderot was Grimm's intimate friend, and the "Fils naturel" appeared with a dedication to Grimm. How could the work have been otherwise than sublime?

The anonymous writer in Bachaumont's Miscellany contents himself with mentioning the production of "Eugénie;" after which he confines himself to making those odious insinuations against the author personally, which were considered graceful in the eighteenth century. When the censorship is exercised in the absence of a well-regulated publicity, there are always secret channels in which hatred can deposit its venom, to the delight of idle persons. Bachaumont's Miscellany is the great sink of the eighteenth century; it is an incoherent collection, in which truth and falsehood, cynicism and wit, ingenious scandal and the blackest calumny, are mixed together like the ingredients of one of those dishes made out of the

* Il détonne si fort *du reste* (*sic*).

leavings of the rich, and destined for the poor; which a contemporary novel, of too much celebrity, has made known to us under the name of *arlequins*.* The author of "Eugénie," however, had no occasion to distress himself either about Grimm's "Correspondence," or Bachaumont's "Nouvelles," as neither of these sheets were public; but he was much annoyed by Fréron's "Année Littéraire," the opinions of which exercised a great influence, while its severity frightened him. Fréron had as yet written nothing about the piece, when Beaumarchais took an opportunity (not without going a long way to find it) of getting at the formidable critic, and addressed a letter to him, the modesty of which, when compared with that of his letter to Mesdames de France, which we have previously given, will help to give some notion of the diversity of his manner.

"I do not think I have the honour of being personally known to you, which makes me still more impressed by the kind things repeated to me yesterday evening. A person of my acquaintance, who met you in society, assured me it was impossible to speak with more moderation than you did of certain parts which appeared reprehensible to you in the drama of 'Eugénie,' or to praise with a more estimable frankness those which you thought calculated to interest right-minded people. In this way judicious and severe criticism becomes very useful to writers. If your occupations permit you to see the piece again to-night, now that I have

* *Vide* "Mysteries of Paris."—TRANS.

taken out certain portions, which, in my limited acquaintance with the stage, I had at first considered good, I beg that you will do so by means of this ticket for the amphitheatre. When you have seen it a second time, I will beg your permission to call and have some talk with you about it. In the meanwhile be assured of the high consideration and gratitude with which

"I have the honour to be, Sir, &c.,

"CARON DE BEAUMARCHAIS.'

Now comes the answer of the austere Fréron.

"Saturday, Feb. 7, 1767.

"I am very sensible, Sir, of your politeness, and very sorry I cannot profit by it; but I never go to the play with tickets. Do not be offended at my sending you back the one you have done me the honour to address to me.*

"As for your drama, I am delighted you are pleased at what I said of it; but I will not conceal from you that I thought and said more against than in favour of it, after the first representation, the only one I have seen. I have no doubt that the excisions which had to be made, and which you have made in this work, have improved it. The success which it meets with at present makes me presume so. I propose to go and see it next week, and I shall be very pleased, I can assure you, Sir, to join my approbation to that of the public. I have the honour to be, with the highest consideration, &c.

"FREERON."

It is evident that the austere Fréron is determined to preserve his liberty of critiçism unshackled; we

* Do not this offer of a ticket, and Fréron's refusal of it, seem to indicate that, at this period, professional critics made it a point of honour to pay for their places at the theatre? I content myself with putting this insignificant question, not having the means of answering it at hand.

find it in that condition in his account of "Eugénie," which is severe, but conscientious and judicious, and which opens spitefully, as follows :—"Baron Hartley, an old Welsh nobleman, father of Eugénie, drinks a *small glass of maraschino,*" &c. It is, in fact, thus the drama opens, and the object of this spiteful phrase of Fréron's is, in the first instance, to call attention to an error on the part of Beaumarchais, which he afterwards seriously refutes. In his enthusiasm for Diderot, the author of "Eugénie" had borrowed from him the idea of a minute, and even ridiculous description of all the dresses of the actors, and of a multitude of little scenic effects, either insignificant or laboured, which constitute what Fréron calls the "infantile poetics" of Diderot. Fréron laughs, with reason, at all these minutiæ, particularly the pantomimic scenes between the acts, which Beaumarchais offers to us as an admirable invention. This invention consists in showing us, during the intervals, servants who are arranging chairs, opening trunks, or stretching themselves and yawning about on sofas; or at another time the Baron coming out of his daughter's bedroom holding a lighted candle in one hand, and searching in his pocket with the other for a key, and all for the sake of being close to nature. "Why," says Fréron, "not introduce a sweeper? Our theatre has no need of these apish tricks, of which the Italians and foreigners have been long in posses-

sion. This is plunging the French stage into the meanness and vulgarity of its early years." At the same time, while he criticises with severity all that displeases him, Fréron analyses the piece with much precision. He mentions its success, as we have already shown, calls attention to the merits of the three first acts, and above all, to the moving scenes of the third. He declares the two last to be badly constructed and badly written, and ends by réfuting the author's theories on the drama; a refutation in which he points out with much justice, not only the false doctrines, but also the expressions which are incorrect or forced, which Beaumarchais frequently employs, such as, for example: "The light provoking weapons of ridicule have *never decided* an affair: they can, at most, be only permitted against those *cowards of adversaries.*" . . . "*The sentences and plumes of the tragic, the points and cockades of the comic, are interdicted* in the serious style,"* &c.

Although it met with a severe reception from the critics, the drama of "Eugénie" succeeded not only in France, but also in England. A celebrated actor, Gar-

* *i.e.*—In the mixed or domestic drama, which he was anxious to introduce. The following are the phrases objected to by Fréron as "incorrect or forced:"—l'arme légère et badine du sarcasme n'a jamais *décidé d'affaires;* elle est tout au plus permise contre ces *poltrons d'adversaires* . . . . . les *sentences et les plumes du tragique et les cocardes du comique sont interdites* au genre sérieux, &c.

rick, conceived the notion of having it translated and acted in London, with certain modifications, under the title of the "School for Rakes." I find this to have been the case, by a letter from Garrick to Beaumarchais, from which the following is an extract:—

"'The School for Rakes,' which is rather an imitation than a translation of your 'Eugénie,' was written by a lady to whose notice I had recommended your drama, which had given me the greatest pleasure, and out of which I thought a piece could be made that would be singularly pleasing to an English audience; and I was not mistaken, for with my assistance (as is stated in the advertisement preceding the piece) our 'Eugénie' received the continued applause of the most numerous audiences."

This first success was altogether sufficiently flattering to encourage Beaumarchais to persist in a course which was not precisely one for which he was fitted by nature. Happily for him, his second attempt was a failure, and diverted his attention for a time from the "serious style." This second drama of his was also inspired by an idea of Diderot, to this effect: that the representation of social situations should be substituted for the representation of character; and that all social situations are almost equally available for dramatic purposes. According to this erroneous principle, Beaumarchais conceived the notion of two friends living together, one of whom, Mélac, was a receiver of taxes; the other, Aurelly, being a Lyons merchant. Aurelly has to

take up a bill, for which he is expecting funds from Paris; Mélac, who hears that the desired funds are not forthcoming, and who sees that his friend may have to suspend payment, takes all the money which has been paid to him as receiver of taxes, and places it in Aurelly's cash-box, without the knowledge of the latter, who is made to believe that these are the funds he was expecting from Paris. At this juncture appears a Farmer-general, who is going his rounds, and who calls upon Mélac for his receipts. Throughout two acts, the latter persists in passing for a thief who has made away with the funds intrusted to him; and as the honest Aurelly is ignorant that the money which had been intrusted to Mélac is in his cash-box, he unites with the Farmer-general to overwhelm his heroic friend with reproaches, until at last all is discovered, and the Farmer-general, an impressionable and romantic man, undertakes to arrange everything.

Without speaking of all that was forced and chimerical in this persistence of Mélac in preserving a silence which dishonours him, which must soon be broken, and which, when broken, will only have served to postpone his friend's bankruptcy for a time, these commercial scenes presented an interest of too special a nature to act upon the large body of spectators. In spite of the precepts of Diderot, it is certain that the public will always receive a greater impression

from moving situations which spring from the opposition of characters and the conflict of passions, than from those which are attached to any social profession. It may happen to each one to suffer, to love, to hate, in virtue of the impulses of his nature; and every one cannot form a very precise idea of what a person experiences when he is exposed to bankruptcy, and when he is supposed to have appropriated money out of a cash-box. These situations, too exceptional to appeal to the heart, too common-place to have any hold on the imagination, may contribute to the interest of the drama, but only on condition of being introduced in an accessory manner; while Diderot, on the contrary, meant them to form the principal subjects. It was in vain that, by way of softening the harshness of such a subject, Beaumarchais introduced the somewhat graceful episode of the loves of Pauline and Mélac's son; a few brilliant and pathetic scenes could not save this too commercial drama of "The Two Friends." Played for the first time, January 13, 1770, it lingered until the tenth representation, which was the last. As the author had, to use his own expression, the advantage over "his unfortunate brothers of the pen," of being able to go to the theatre in his carriage, and made, perhaps, too great a parade of this advantage, the result was, that his failure was received with a great many jokes. It was said that at the end of the first representation, a wag

in the pit had cried out, "This is all an affair of bankruptcy; I am down for my twenty sous." Some days afterwards, Beaumarchais having had the imprudence to say to Sophie Arnould, in reference to an opera called "Zoroaster," which was not successful, "In a week you will have no one, or nearly so;" the witty actress replied to him, "Your 'Friends' will bring us some." To conclude, the capital defect of "The Two Friends" was summed up in this quatrain, of the period, cited by Grimm:—

"I've seen Beaumarchais' piece, it's so absurd,
I'll tell you all about it in a word.
While capital is worked in every way,
There's nought like interest throughout the play."

As authors have often for their productions the same kind of affection which causes a mother to give her preference to the most sickly of her children, Beaumarchais always expressed a particular esteem for his drama of "The Two Friends." In a letter which he wrote to the actors in 1779, requesting them to revive it, he says: "The construction of this drama is stronger than that of all my other works."*

* This letter will be found in the Appendix, No. 4, with an answer from the actor Monvel, father of Mademoiselle Mars, together with one of the graceful communications of Mademoiselle Doligny, of which I have already spoken. It must be mentioned that at the period of this correspondence, in 1779, Beaumarchais was conducting the suit of the authors against the actors of the French theatre; as

The style is probably more correct than that of "Eugénie," but that is not sufficient. The author adds, that it has been represented with success at all the "French theatres of Europe." Gudin contents himself with saying, that it was particularly liked in the commercial towns; which is probable. One thing is certain, that at the present day it is played nowhere. However, in January 1770 Beaumarchais could easily console himself for the failure of a drama; he was rich, busy, and happy. Between the production of "Eugénie" and that of "The Two Friends," he had contrived to make himself loved by the young and beautiful widow of a garde-général, named Lévêque; and in April 1768 he married this Madame Lévêque, formerly Geneviève Madeleine Watebled, who brought him a brilliant fortune. With the co-operation of Pâris Du Verney, he purchased from the State a large portion of the Forest of Chinon, out of which he made money; and he was still more occupied in selling wood* than in writing dramas. In a letter of this period, dated from a village in Touraine, he appears to us as a dealer in wood, intelligent, active, fond of scenery, and with a touch of rural poetry

the latter were afraid of him, they endeavoured to make themselves agreeable.

* La Harpe was completely deceived when he stated generally, that "this speculation in wood could not be carried out." Beaumarchais sold the wood of the Forest of Chinon for many years.

which one would scarcely expect to find in him; for his works, which are all redolent of the air of Paris, do not offer the least trace of such a sentiment. The letter is addressed to his second wife.

"De Rivarennes, July 15, 1769.

"You request me to write to you, my dear love. I will do so with all my heart; it will be most agreeable recreation, after the labour I have been forced to undergo during my stay in this village. Misunderstandings between directors, who had to be reconciled; complaints and petitions which had to be attended to from clerks; an account to go over of more than 100,000 crowns, broken up into claims of 20 and 30 sous, and from which the cashier, who is liable for it, must be relieved; the different harbours to visit; to see 200 of the workmen in the forest, and examine their work; to arrange the preparation and transport of 280 acres of wood, which is already cut; to construct new roads from the forest to the river, and repair the old ones; to stow away three or four hundred thousand measures of hay; to get a provision of oats for thirty dray-horses; to buy thirty more horses for six more waggons, in order to take away all our wood for the navy, before winter; gates and sluices to construct on the river Indre, so as to provide us with water during the whole year, in the place where the wood is embarked; 50 barges waiting for their cargoes to start off for Tours, Saumur, Angers, and Nantes; to sign the leases for seven or eight farms, which altogether supply the provisions of a household of thirty persons; the general account of our receipts and disbursements during two years to regulate. Such, my dear wife, is briefly the amount of my labours, a portion of which I have terminated, while I am getting on with the rest."

After two more pages of similar details, Beaumar-

chais concludes with this graceful and animated picture of rural life:*

"You see, my dear love, we do not sleep here so much as at Pantin; but the active work to which I am forced, does not displease me. Since arriving in this retreat, inaccessible as it is to vanity, I have seen none but natural, simple-minded persons, such as I often wish to be myself. I live in my offices, which I have established in a good countrified farm, between the poulty yard and the kitchen garden, and surrounded by a green hedge. My bedroom, which has no upholstery beyond the whitewash on the walls, is furnished with an indifferent bed, in which I sleep like a top; four rush-bottomed chairs, an oaken table, a large fireplace without mantelpiece or anything else; but from the window, as I write to you, I see all the meadows and plains of the valley which I inhabit, filled with robust men of bronzed complexion, who are cutting and carrying off fodder with their teams of oxen; a multitude of women and girls, with rakes on their shoulders or in their hands, are filling the air as they work with their lively songs, which I hear from my table; through the trees in the distance, I see the winding stream of the Indre, and an ancient château flanked by its towers, which belongs to my neighbour, Madame de Roncée. The whole scene is crowned by the tufted summits of the trees, which increase in number until they are lost on the crests of the heights which surround us, so that they form a large spherical frame-work round the horizon, which they shut out on all sides. This picture is not without its charms. Coarse, wholesome bread, dishes which are more than simple, with execrable wine; form my diet. Really, if I could venture to wish you such a misfortune as to be in want of everything in a desolate country, I should regret exceedingly not to have you with me. Adieu, my

* His wife was at this time installed in a country-house at Pantin.

love. If you think these details can amuse our good friends and relations, I leave you at liberty to read them together one evening by yourselves. Kiss them all into the bargain; and now good-night, I am going to bed. But my son, my son, how is he? I laugh when I think I am working for him."

The kind and affectionate nature which is exhibited in this letter, was soon put to a severe test. When he had been married less than three years, Beaumarchais lost his second wife, who died on the 21st November, 1770, after childbirth. Calumniators did not fail to say, that there was something strange in his thus losing his second wife, and that it tended to confirm the rumours which had been circulated as to the death of the first. There was certainly one little difficulty about the hypothesis: at least half the fortune of his second wife consisted in an annuity. Beaumarchais had thus the greatest interest in her life, besides, she left him a child; but these foul anecdote-mongers were not so particular as to details. However, when the son himself died two years after his mother, October 17, 1772, the calumniators were afraid to be logical; they did not think, says La Harpe, of insinuating that he had also poisoned his child.

Such, then, was the situation of Beaumarchais in 1771. As a private individual he had once more passed from opulence to a position which was far from being brilliant; as a writer he had not yet attained reputation. The flattering though ephemeral success of his first

drama had been effaced by the failure of the second. The great body of the public only considered him as a sentimental and ponderous dramatist of the Diderot school; no one yet saw in him the future author of the "Barber of Seville;" and the following account, which Palissot gave of him in a satire of the period, was thought to be true enough:—

> "Beaumarchais, too obscure to be interesting,
> Of Diderot, his God, is the powerless ape."*

Just then a law-suit, which seemed calculated to have no other result than that of dishonouring and ruining him, was the origin of another which appeared destined to crush him completely, and the effect of which was to exhibit all the comic power which nature had gifted him with, to replace him on the road to an immense fortune, and to make him for a time the most celebrated and popular man of his country and age.

* "Beaumarchais, trop obscur pour être intéressant,
De son dieu Diderot est le singe impuissant."

CHAPTER VIII.

BEAUMARCHAIS AND HIS LAW-SUITS.—THE COUNT DE LA BLACHE. — AN INGENIOUS ADVOCATE. — THE DISPUTED DOCUMENT. — DEATH OF BEAUMARCHAIS' SECOND WIFE.—AN INDISCRETION.—THE "BARBER OF SEVILLE."

The first of the great law-suits, which were destined to give a new course to Beaumarchais' life, lasted seven years. In the first place won, then lost, and afterwards won again, it placed the author of "Eugénie" in a position to suffer from all kinds of enmity and persecution. The famous action against Goëzman arose out of this grave affair, the circumstances of which have hitherto been somewhat incorrectly narrated. It is desirable to give the true facts of the case, to show that it was not simply an affair of money, as La Harpe states, and to explain why the Prince de Conti said, not without reason, in reference to the contest, "Beaumarchais must be either paid or hanged," which made Beaumarchais reply: "But if I gain my suit, do you not think that my adversary ought to pay *cord*ially himself?" The reader remembers how old Pâris Du

Verney, ex-commissary-general, founder and director of the Military School, had become attached to the protégé of the Princesses, had advised him, assisted him in making his way at court by lending him money to buy appointments, and had given him a share in various commercial operations, so as to enable him to pay back the money he had lent him. Owing to this connection, both in friendship and business, which lasted ten years, during which period Beaumarchais was often intrusted by Du Verney with important negotiations, and which finally brought about the partnership into which they entered, with a view of purchasing the forest of Chinon, large sums of money had passed between them, of which no account had been drawn up in a regular manner. Beaumarchais, in consequence of the great age of Du Verney, and fearing to be involved in a law-suit with his heirs, on several occasions asked him in a very pressing manner to go over the accounts. He did so at last, on the 1st of April 1770, by means of a duplicate document, sealed on each side, by which, after a long enumeration of the debtor and creditor accounts of each of the contracting parties, Beaumarchais restored to Du Verney 160,000 francs in his own bills, and agreed to the dissolution of their partnership in the forest of Chinon. On his part Du Verney declared that Beaumarchais owed him nothing, acknowledged himself his debtor

to the amount of 15,000 francs, payable to him on demand, and bound himself to lend him the sum of 75,000 francs for eight years, without interest. These two clauses had not yet been fulfilled when Du Verney died, July 17, 1770, at 87 years of age, leaving a fortune of about 1,500,000 francs. Having no relations but nephews and grand nephews, he had chosen for his sole legatee one of his grand nephews by the female side, who had been brought up under his care, and who through his interest had become Maréchal-de-Camp. This was the Count de la Blache. The Count de la Blache had long said of Beaumarchais, "I hate this man, as a lover loves his mistress." La Harpe, who was not well acquainted with the facts, appears to have been astonished at this hatred, and brings it forward as one of the singular things in Beaumarchais' life. There was, however, nothing singular about it; first of all, it was natural enough that an heir presumptive should not have any great fancy for a person who had received and might still receive benefits from an old man whose fortune he looked upon as his own. In the next place, the Count de la Blache had private motives for disliking Beaumarchais. Beaumarchais was very intimate with another nephew of Pâris Du Verney's by the male side, M. Pâris de Meyzieu, a distinguished man, who had aided his uncle materially in founding the Ecole Militaire, but who was

not so clever in the art, so difficult and painful to noble dispositions, of securing an inheritance, and retired from all contest, allowing himself to be sacrificed to a more distant relation. Beaumarchais considering this unfair, had never ceased to combat the weakness of his old friend Du Verney, and to take the part of M. de Meyzieu, with a frankness and activity which are proved by his letters, from which I will only quote one fragment, written in reference to the settlement of the accounts in question.

"I cannot bear the idea," he writes to Du Verney, March 9, 1770, "of being placed, in case of your death, in relation with M. le Comte de la Blache, whom I respect with all my heart, but who, since I have met him at Madame d'Hauteville's house, has never done me the honour to bow to me. You make him your heir: I have nothing to say about that; but, if in case of the greatest misfortune which could happen to me, I am to be his debtor, I must decline any arrangement; I shall not dissolve the partnership. Put me in a position to act with my friend Meyzieu, who is a gallant and honourable man, and to whom, my dear friend, you have long owed some reparation. An uncle does not offer apologies to his nephew, but acts of kindness, and above all of assistance, when he feels that he has acted wrongly towards him. I have never disguised from him my opinion on the subject. Let me be accountable to him. This souvenir, which you will leave him, when he leasts expects it, will fill his heart with a gratitude worthy of such a favour. To conclude, this is all I can say: you, or in default of you,

Meyzieu, or no dissolution of partnership.* I have other reasons for laying a stress upon this point; but I will communicate them to you orally. When shall we see one another? for, I give you notice that until then I shall do nothing in the matter."

It will be easily understood that Beaumarchais' partiality for the rejected nephew was little calculated to gain the friendship of the favoured one. The Count de la Blache detested him, then, cordially, and when after the death of Du Verney, Beaumarchais sent his settlement of accounts to him, and summoned him to act upon the document, he replied that he did not recognise his uncle's signature, and that he looked upon the document as a forgery. When challenged to make an accusation of forgery, by way of avoiding the consequences of a failure in so dangerous an action, he declared that he reserved to himself the right of taking this step, and, in the meanwhile, called upon the tribunals to annul the statement of accounts, as containing internal evidence of fraud, so that Beaumarchais found himself taken in the meshes of the most odious snare; for, while he dared not accuse him openly of forgery, the Count de la Blache continued to plead indirectly the commission of the act;

* Referring to Du Verney's wish to dissolve the partnership in reference to the Forest of Chinon, to which Beaumarchais gave his consent, but only on certain conditions.

and yet, after the question had been argued with all the stigma attached to it, he wished to turn against Beaumarchais the very deed he declared to be forged. Then, not satisfied with claiming from him the payment of 53,500 livres of debts, which were marked down in Du Verney's papers, and annulled by the said statement of accounts—since, in the statement of accounts, Beaumarchais carried to Du Verney's account not 53,500 livres, but 139,000 livres, an increase which was compensated for by a more considerable one upon Du Verney—his adversary demanded, with naïveté, that the pretended forgery should only have the effect of annulling Beaumarchais' claim on Du Verney, while it left intact the entire claim of 139,000 livres of Du Verney upon Beaumarchais, which could only be allowed on the supposition that the statement of accounts was genuine. Hence it followed that Beaumarchais, instead of receiving 15,000 livres, which the document in question entitled him to, would have to pay 139,000 livres, from which it liberated him. "Thus," said Maître Caillard, the very ingenious and very insulting advocate selected by the Count de la Blache, "thus justice will be avenged, and honest citizens will be satisfied, when they see such an adversary taken in his own snares." This civil way of taking advantage of a document declared to be a forgery, and transforming a claim of 53,500 francs

into a debt of 139,000 francs, already seems to indicate more ingenuity than good faith on the part of Du Verney's legatee, or at least on that of his counsel. But, as I did not undertake this book in the character of Beaumarchais' advocate, and wished to be acquainted with all the documents relating to this law-suit, I procured, with some trouble, all the memorials of the Count de la Blache's advocate, and read them, together with the answers of Beaumarchais. I have before me the original of this famous statement of accounts, which had travelled from the Parliament of Paris to the Parliament of Aix, and which, during seven years, had been subjected to the inspection of so many judges, and so many advocates, that it had become necessary to keep it together by means of strips of paper pasted along the sides. In providing myself with all the documents calculated to enlighten me on the subject, my object was to ascertain exactly, not whether Beaumarchais ought or ought not to have received the 15,000 francs which he claimed—that being of but little importance to posterity—but whether he was an audacious forger, or an honest man undeservedly calumniated, which was far more important. I might, strictly speaking, have dispensed with this fatiguing inquiry; for, after all, Beaumarchais, after gaining his action on the first trial, and losing it on an appeal, through circumstances which will be ex-

plained, obtained a reversal of the latter decision, and a final judgment from the Parliament of Provence, dated July 21, 1778. This judgment gave all the points in his favour, declared the statement of accounts perfectly valid, ordered the Count de la Blache to execute it in its integrity, and moreover ordered him to pay the expenses of the action, and 12,000 francs damages for the calumny he had uttered. The question then was completely settled, and I might have trusted to the final judgment of the Parliament of Provence; but it was enough that so injurious a suspicion should have been hanging over Beaumarchais' head for seven years, it was enough that this prolonged calumny should have left its fatal trace in his life, which we shall meet with more than once, for me to feel it necessary to obtain a complete conviction for myself, with regard to so grave a point.

First of all, as to the question of probability. Was it probable that in April, 1770, Beaumarchais, possessing a certain fortune of his own, and moreover enjoying the wealth brought to him by his second wife, who was still alive (it may be remembered that she only died on the 21st of November of the same year), was it probable that in this position Beaumarchais would have run the risk of forging a document in order to avoid paying to Du Verney's heir 53,500 francs, and to obtain from him 15,000 francs, particularly when he knew beforehand that this heir, who was a man

of quality, a Maréchal-de-Camp, possessing great interest and a great fortune, hated him with all his heart, and would neglect nothing to ruin him if he could do so? There is already something in this which shocks all probability.

Supposing now that Beaumarchais had wished, and had been able to forge this document, would he have given it the form this one had? It is a large double sheet of paper, of the kind known as "à la Tellière;" the very complicated details of the statement, written in Beaumarchais' own hand, fill the two first pages; at the end of the second page it is signed on the right by Beaumarchais, and on the left, dated and signed by Du Verney. The third page contains a *résumé* in figures of the general terms of this statement. What did the Count de la Blache's advocate say of this document? He discussed it with all an advocate's ease; at one time he insinuated that the signature of Du Verney was a forgery; at another, when called upon to make the accusation of forgery, he declared that if it was genuine, it had been signed at a period anterior to the date of 1770; "a period at which," he said, "Old Du Verney's hand was tremulous, whilst the signature at the foot of this document was written boldly, and by a hand which must have been firm and light." Here the advocate pretended not to see what was staring him in the face—that above the signature of Du Verney, written in the

same ink, and the same handwriting, were the words, "Paris, April 1, 1770." That is to say, Du Verney had not only signed, but dated the deed in question; which necessitated the hypothesis that he was in the habit of amusing himself, either in his youth, or at an advanced age, by signing blank documents, and dating them beforehand, so as to have them ready for the close of his life. Defeated on this point, the advocate then insinuated that this large double sheet of paper must be a blank document, signed and dated by Du Verney, without doubt in 1770, but for an entirely different object; and that it had afterwards been abstracted and filled up by Beaumarchais. Now, what likelihood was there that Du Verney—whose methodic habits were moreover brought against Beaumarchais—would have left lying about his house, with no stated object, stamped documents, signed exactly at the end of the second page of a large sheet of paper, "à la Tellière," and moreover, signed, not in the middle of the paper, but on the left, precisely so as to keep a place on the right for a second signature? What likelihood, in fine, was there that Beaumarchais—against whom it was argued, on the other hand, that during the latter days of Du Verney's life he could scarcely ever get near him (which was true)—had managed to arrive just at the moment for abstracting a stamped document, prepared in the above strange manner? Feeling the weakness of his argument,

Beaumarchais' adversary fell back upon the contents of the document in question. He could prove without trouble that its clauses were complicated, diffuse, sometimes even mixed one with the other; and that it contained matters not relating in any way to the statement of accounts. This was true; but it told precisely in favour of Beaumarchais: for if he had been able or willing to forge the document, he would have made it either shorter or more methodic, instead of which, as he was arranging a long series of operations with an old man of eighty-seven, the statement had naturally exhibited something of the old man's prolix and whimsical nature.*

But it will be said, if Beaumarchais had only such feeble arguments to reply to, how, after gaining this action on the first trial, could he have lost it on the appeal? Without speaking here of the influence of Goëzman, who had to prepare the report, we shall afterwards find another councillor of the Maupeou Parliament acknowledge formally, in a letter to Beau-

* The advocate attempted to explain the prolixity of the style in which the document was written, by saying, that the person who prepared it, having abstracted the stamped document, had to fill up two pages, in order to reach as far as Du Verney's signature; but, if Beaumarchais had been capable of such an action, as the table of figures on the third page of the double sheet in no way contributed to the validity of the statement of accounts, nothing would have prevented him from taking a single sheet and writing the deed on the very page which bore Du Verney's signature at the extremity; he would thus have only had one page to fill up.

marchais, that the rumours publicly circulated about him, had influenced him much in his decision. It must, however, be added, for the sake of correctness, that there were some circumstances connected with this law-suit, which were calculated to make a certain impression upon judges who were already strongly prejudiced; for instance, if the reader has followed us with attention, he will, doubtless, already have inquired what had become of the duplicate of the statement of accounts between Beaumarchais and Du Verney; it is here that the adversary of Beaumarchais thought to triumph over him, when he exclaimed, "This document, written entirely by yourself, is supposed to have been executed in duplicate between you and Du Verney; now, no duplicate has been found among the papers of the deceased, consequently no duplicate ever existed, and consequently the deed you present is a forgery." To this Beaumarchais replied, "In consequence of the difficulties which you, his suspicious and avaricious heir, occasioned in my interviews with Du Verney, towards the close of his life, we could scarcely ever meet, except almost in secret. After a long consultation in writing on the subject of our accounts, I sent him the duplicates of the deed which he had commissioned me to draw up, both of them bearing my signature: he sent me back one of the two, after signing it and dating it himself, and kept the other. If the other one was not to be found

among his papers, he had destroyed it or lost it, or you yourself, who never left the room of the deceased, abstracted it before the inventory was made, in order that it might not be used in corroboration of the one I now present to you. As for me, I prove the truth and genuineness of this deed, not only by the deed itself, but by several letters from Du Verney, which I also present to you, the authenticity of which I defy you to disprove, and which are all in reply to questions I had addressed to him with regard to this statement of accounts, and to which he replied with his own hand, without any delay, and upon the very sheet of paper which contained the question, according to our habit of corresponding during ten years; I even present you one of these letters, in which Du Verney writes to me, 'Now the transaction is signed.' What can you reply to this?"

Maître Caillard, the advocate of Count de la Blache, was not to be upset so easily. "This," he said, "is a further proof of M. de Beaumarchais' fraud; the letters with which we are confronted, are perhaps in Du Verney's handwriting, but they are short, vague, without importance; they are not dated; they were written at another time, and about some other subject; and the pretended questions, with their dates, to which they are supposed to be answers, were indorsed afterwards on the same sheet by M. de Beaumarchais. As for the letter in which Du Verney writes, 'The

transaction is now settled,' it alludes to some other transaction."

An examination of the letters destroyed so damaging an interpretation; for Du Verney's answers, although naturally less explicit than Beaumarchais' questions, all of which applied to the statement of accounts, could have reference to no other questions; for some of them are not "endorsed" one upon the other, that is to say, one written on the first and one on the third page of the sheet, but both are on the same page, Du Verney's answer being immediately after Beaumarchais' question, which rendered the frauds imagined by the advocate impossible. And finally, if these answers of Du Verney's did not refer to Beaumarchais' questions, which were supposed to have been written afterwards, they must have referred to other questions and other letters of Beaumarchais, which ought to have been found among Du Verney's papers. Why, then, did not the opponent present them, as he presented all the letters from Beaumarchais to Du Verney from which he thought he could get any advantage? Such is the true view of the deplorable law-suit which Beaumarchais had to carry on for so long a time, obliged as he was either to gain it, or to pass for a forger. All that was singular in the affair, that is to say, the absence of the duplicate of the deed in question; the slightly confused style in which it was drawn up; the somewhat mysterious

character of the correspondence between Du Verney and Beaumarchais, which the latter brought forward in support of this deed; finally, the disappearance from among Du Verney's papers of every document relating to this statement of accounts — all these circumstances might have been explained naturally enough by unprejudiced judges in regard to a man who had been less calumniated, and who was at issue with an adversary of less power, in the following manner: — An old man of eighty-seven, settling with a friend, who was detested by his heir, certain affairs which he did not choose to submit to this heir, had naturally gone to work in a somewhat mysterious manner, while the heir himself was interested in increasing the mystery rather than in dissipating it.

Under the circumstances, these facts when made use of, and distorted by a venomous and quibbling advocate, assumed a sufficiently black appearance to account for the apostrophe which Beaumarchais in his anger addressed to certain pleaders: "Oh! what a contemptible trade is that exercised by a man who, to gain the money of another, makes disgraceful efforts to dishonour a third, alters facts without shame; distorts meanings, adduces authorities which he quotes incorrectly, and sports with falsehood and perjury." In the meanwhile this action, which was commenced in October 17,

1771, before the lower court, then known as that of the *requêtes de l'hôtel*,* was first of all decided in favour of Beaumarchais. The first judgment, dated February 22, 1772, refused the Count de la Blache's petition for rescinding the agreement between Du Verney and Beaumarchais; while a second judgment, dated March 14, 1772, ordered that the statement of accounts, alleged to be forged, should be acted upon. This adversary made an appeal to the High Chamber of Parliament.

Although victorious in the first contest, Beaumarchais suffered much from it. The advocate Caillard had calumniated him outrageously, while the animosity and influence of the Count de la Blache raised all the herd of pamphleteers against him. As the death of his second wife happened to take place while this melancholy debate was going on, it was made use of as a pretext for the atrocious calumnies of which I have already spoken. These calumnies were circulated in the foreign papers, and in those manuscript sheets which supplied in so detestable a manner the place of a free press. They found a ready hearing from all those persons who are annoyed at the high position of a man who has made his own way, above all when this man is not modest about it; and it is quite certain that Beaumarchais

* Corresponding to our now obsolete title, "Court of Requests."—TRANS.

was not. Not content with destroying his reputation, the Count de la Blache, whom he speaks of somewhere as the author of all his misfortunes, had just surprised him, and given him a coward's thrust under the following circumstances:—For a few days before the judgment of the lower court was pronounced, Beaumarchais, learning that his adversary was spreading his report everywhere that the princesses had driven him from their presence for dishonourable actions, had written to the Countess de Perigord, first lady in waiting to the Princess Victoire, to complain of the count's calumnies, and to ask the princesses to bear witness to his honesty and honour. The Countess de Perigord had replied to him immediately by the following letter:—

"Versailles, Feb. 12, 1772.

"I have informed Madame Victoire, Sir, of the contents of your letter, and she assures me *that she never said a word to any one which could injure your reputation; not knowing anything concerning you which could lead her to do so.* She has desired me to communicate this to you. The Princess even added, that she was well aware you were engaged in a law-suit, but that what she said about you, could never do you any harm in any case, particularly in a law-suit, and that you might be at rest upon this point.

"I am delighted that this opportunity, &c.,

"T. Comtesse de Perigord."

Instead of publishing this letter literally, which was quite sufficient to save his honour, Beaumarchais, in

order to make as much as possible out of it, had the imprudence to embody it in a note to one of his Memorials against the Count de la Blache, in which he said, that as his adversary had endeavoured to "deprive him of the flattering protection which Mesdames had always granted him," and had whispered to the judges that he had rendered himself unworthy of their kindness, and that they "no longer took any sort of interest in him," he was authorised by Madame Victoire to publish, &c., &c. Here Beaumarchais gave an exact and faithful *résumé* of the Countess de Perigord's letter, but the commentary which preceded it was both unbecoming and rash. He thus laid himself open to his adversaries, for he seemed to wish to make the princesses say more than they had really said, and to transform a simple mark of esteem, a simple certificate of his honesty, into an engagement to use their influence and interest on his behalf with regard to his law-suit; which was necessarily offensive to princesses who were conscious of their duties. He had scarcely committed this blunder, when the Count de la Blache hurried to Versailles, procured admission to the princesses' presence, and complained to them that Beaumarchais had made an unworthy use of their name to the detriment of a Maréchal-de-Camp, and that, in a printed Memorial, he had had the audacity to affirm that the princesses took the most lively interest in the success of his suit. Beaumarchais had not

said that, but it has just been seen, that in speaking of "interest" and "protection," he might be accused of endeavouring to let that be understood. The princesses were irritated, and the Count de la Blache, taking advantage of this, procured from them the following little *billet-doux*:—

"We declare that we take no interest in M. Caron de Beaumarchais and his law-suit, and we have not given him permission to state, in a printed and public Memorial, that he enjoys our protection.

"MARIE-ADELAIDE, VICTOIRE-LOUISE,
"SOPHIE-PHILIPPINE, ELISABETH-JUSTINE.

"Versailles, Feb. 15, 1772."

This declaration, which was immediately afterwards printed and published by the Count de la Blache, circulated everywhere. If it did not prevent the judges, who had seen the Countess de Perigord's letter, from doing justice to Beaumarchais, although they ordered the suppression of the indiscreet note which he had been guilty of publishing, the public were completely deceived by it, in whose eyes the author of the note appeared not only as a man who had been guilty of an indiscretion, in commenting on and amplifying a perfectly genuine expression of esteem, but as a double impostor, who, to support a false statement of accounts, produced a false certificate of honesty. To complete his misfortune, Beaumarchais, feeling that he had done wrong in thus commenting on and exaggerating

the support given him by the Princess Victoire, and fearing to offend her by maintaining the truth, did not dare to publish the Countess de Perigord's letter, which explained his commentary, and found himself obliged to remain silent, under the effects of the suspected imposition.* Things were in this state; the action was going on in appeal; Beaumarchais, struggling as best he could against an adversary of influence, and his own bad reputation, was gaining some repose from this war of quibbles, by writing "The Barber of Seville;" when an incident, as strange as it was unexpected, occurred to complete the embarrassment of his situation, and to supply fresh food for the malice of his enemies.

* It was not until two years afterwards that he determined to reply. In December, 1773, when the law-suit was going on which the Councillor Goëzman instituted against him, and which will soon come under our notice, Beaumarchais found himself accused again, by this judge, of having invented a testimonial from the Princess Victoire. Goëzman here acted in bad faith, for he knew of the Countess de Perigord's letter, and pretended to be ignorant of it. It was only then that Beaumarchais published this letter, endeavouring, with much skill, to palliate his conduct in making such an indiscreet use of it. I have just explained, with much exactness, in what this indiscretion consisted, and how the Count de la Blache managed to profit by it.

APPENDIX.

No. 1 (page 136).

OPTIMISM,

UNPUBLISHED POEM WRITTEN BY BEAUMARCHAIS IN HIS YOUTH ON TWO REPEATED RHYMES.

PARTOUT on cherche, on étudie
La cause des malheurs divers
Qui désolent cet univers,
Des humains la triste patrie.
Nul n'est d'accord, chacun varie :
J'entends les partisans diserts
Du système de bonhomie
Vanter l'immuable harmonie
Qu'ils remarquent dans l'univers,
D'après les calculs de génie
Et des Leibnitz et des Képlers,
Que tous ces fous, dans leur manie,
Ont nommés célestes concerts ;
Moi, je n'oppose à leur folie
Qu'une foule d'arguments clairs,
Et je dis : Sagesse infinie !

L'axe qui sous la terre plie
Semble exprès posé de travers
Par une puissance ennemie ;
De là naît l'horreur des hivers,
Où toute la terre engourdie,
Sans fleurs, sans fruits, sans arbres verts,
N'offre, la moitié de la vie,
Que des champs de frimas couverts.
Sur ce seul exposé, je nie
Que tout soit bien dans l'univers.

D'un point de ma sphère aplatie
Si je m'élance au haut des airs,
Je vois, dans sa marche étourdie,
Ce dieu qui fit pleurer Clytie,
Brûlant l'Afrique et ses déserts,
Et laissant glacer la Scythie.
Lorsque, dans la nue épaissie,
La foudre formée, endurcie,
S'allumant au feu des éclairs,
Tombe, éclate, écrase, incendie ;
Lorsque la bienfaisante pluie,
Par son passage dans deux airs,
En grêle affreuse convertie,
Ravage les champs découverts,
Moissonne la plaine enrichie,
Et les change en tristes déserts,
Dites-moi, Sagesse infinie,
Tout est-il biens dans l'univers ?

Lorsqu'Eole brise les fers
Du terrible amant d'Orithie,
Des cavernes de Livonie,
Des Etats glacés de Péters,
Il parcourt l'Europe et l'Asie,

Soulève, tourmente, charrie
L'Océan, l'Euxin, la Caspie ;
Brise, au pays des calenders,
Les croissants de Sainte-Sophie ;
Couche les pins, les chênes verts
De l'Espagne, de l'Arabie ;
Fait mille tourbillons divers
Des sables brûlants de Lybie,
Les disperse, obscurcit les airs
De la Norwége en Nigritie.
Des hommes blancs, noirs, jaunes, verts,
De sa fougue ont l'âme transie ;
Mais son triomphe est sur les mers :
Là, ballottant avec furie
De frêles vaisseaux entr'ouverts,
Le pâle nautonier qui prie,
Après mille tourments soufferts,
Voit souvent sa nef engloutie,
Et dans le sein des flots amers
Finit sa déplorable vie.
Fauteurs d'une secte abrutie !
Si cette peinture est sentie,
Tout est-il bien ? Suivez ces vers.

L'homme, en entrant dans l'univers,
Reçoit la mort avec la vie ;
Enfant mutin, débile, iners,
Tout le blesse, le contrarie.
Il croît ; ses organes ouverts
A peine acquièrent l'énergie,
Que sa conduite calomnie
Les préceptes sacrés et chers
Dont sa jeunesse fut munie.
L'erreur, le vice, les travers
L'enchaînent sours leur tyrannie ;

Chaque âge il change de manie :
Je vois des casques, des hauberts ;
C'est à la mort qu'il sacrifie,
Il combat, il est dans les fers.
Ailleurs, il plaide, il négocie ;
Envieux, en butte à l'envie,
Il souffre, il vieillit, il s'ennuie.

La goutte, l'asthme, les cancers,
Les rhumatismes, l'ophthalmie,
L'humeur froide aux globules verts,
Les scrofules, la strangurie :
Voilà les dignes prix offerts
Aux vertus de toute sa vie.
Après une foule infinie
De maux mérités et soufferts,
Il meurt ; son âme évanouie
N'a rien laissé qu'une momie,
L'horrible pâture des vers ;
Il meurt ; sa carrière accomplie
N'offre qu'un tissu de revers
Parsemé de grains de folie.
Quels sont donc ces biens qu'on envie ?
Des bords du néant aux enfers
La pente rapide établie,
Serrant la chaîne qui les lie,
Entraîne tout, maîtres et serfs.
La race présente, assoupie,
Par la prochaine est engloutie ;
Une autre naît, passe, est suivie
D'une qui vient, fuit et s'oublie.
Je les aperçois, je les perds,
Ainsi qu'une goutte de pluie,
Au vaste Océan réunie,
Ou comme des coureurs altiers,

Dans leur marche trop tôt finie,
Transmettant à d'autres, plus fiers,
Le triste flambeau de la vie :
Et tout est bien dans l'univers !

Si tout est bien, que signifie
Que, par un despote asservie,
Ma liberté me soit ravie ?
Mille vœux au ciel sont offerts,
En tous lieux l'humanité crie ;
Un homme est esclave en Syrie,
On le mutile en Italie ;
Son sort est digne des enfers
Aux Antilles, en Barbarie.
Si votre âme en est attendrie,
Montrez-moi, raisonneurs très-chers,
Sur quelle loi *préétablie*
Mon existence est avilie,
Lorsque, par les documents clairs
D'une saine philosophie.

Que le sentiment fortifie,
Je sais que l'auteur de ma vie
M'a créé libre, et que je sers.
Suis-je un méchant, suis-je un impie,
Lorsqu'avec douleur je m'écrie :
Tout est fort mal dans l'univers ?

Lorsque je vois l'hypocrisie,
En robe noire ou cramoisie,
Ou sous l'humble froc d'un convers
Le face austère et repentie,
Montrer à l'un les cieux ouverts,
Menacer l'autre des enfers,
Et, sous le masque d'Uranie,

Que de la terre elle a bannie,
Abuser des secrets divers
Que la sottise lui confie ;
Quand je vois qu'avec tyrannie
Elle absout, elle excommunie,
Et que sa fière hiérarchie
Obtient toujours pour juge un tiers,
Et tient, dans une monarchie,
En vertu d'une liturgie,
Sur ses intérêts les plus chers,
Le vrai pouvoir en léthargie :
Tout est-il bien dans l'univers ?

Quand j'aperçois la jalousie,
A l'accueil sombre, aux yeux couverts,
Dont l'âme ne se rassasie
Que de pertes et de revers,
Traînant à sa suite l'envie,
La noirceur et la perfidie ;
Des gens d'opprobre tout couverts,
Des sots, des têtes à l'envers
Etre la bonne compagnie ;
De petits grands seigneurs tout fiers
D'un nom qu'ils notent d'infamie,
Des femmes dont l'ignominie,
Perçant à travers leurs grands airs,
Par des fripons est applaudie :
Tout est donc bien dans l'univers !

. . . . . .

. . . . . .

Quand je vois l'Encyclopédie,
Cette œuvre immortelle, hardie,
Des Diderot, des d'Alembert
Et d'autres hommes de génie,
Livrée à la misanthropie,

A l'esprit louche et de travers
D'un convulsionnaire impie,
Puis dénoncée à l'ineptie
De ces juges, conseillers, clercs,
Qui font à la théologie
Décider si la maladie
Qui bouillonne au-dessus des chairs
Peut être insérée et guérie :
Tout est-il bien dans l'univers ?

Rameau, père de l'harmonie,
Quand j'entends traiter tes beaux airs
De raboteuse mélodie
Par des histrions d'Italie
Dignes de nos derniers concerts ;
Et toi, l'honneur de ma patrie,
Auteur d'*Alzire* et d'*Olympie*,
Et de mille ouvrages divers,
Charmants, pleins de philosophie ;
Quand je vois tes sublimes vers
En butte au jugement pervers
D'un hebdomadaire en furie,
Faut-il qu'insensé je m'écrie :
Tout est au mieux dans l'univers ?

Si je regarde sur les mers,
Je vois un amiral Saunders
Dont l'audace trop impunie,
Avant la campagne finie,
Va mettre l'Amérique aux fers.
Si je m'arrête en Germanie,
Je vois un roi de Silésie
Qui, pour passer sa fantaisie
D'être premier entre ses pairs,
Ravage la Saxe asservie,

Etonne, arrête la Russie ;
Sans commerce, sans ports ouverts,
Par la force de son génie
Fixe la fortune ennemie,
Pendant le cours de sept hivers,
Brave la valeur réunie
Des généraux les plus experts,
Reprend Schwednitz, le fortifie,
Cueille des lauriers toujours verts,
Et comme l'humaine folie
Avec l'horreur se concilie
Dans la tête d'un roi pervers,
Ecrit sur la philosophie,
Fait de la musique et des vers,
Cependant qu'on lui sacrifie,
Aux fossés, aux chemins couverts,
Les nourriciers de la patrie,*
La source de leur sang tarie
Va fumant jusqu'aux *boulleverts*
Qui renferment cette furie,
Parfums bien dignes d'être offerts
Au Salomon de Bulgarie :
Et tout est bien dans l'univers ?

Plus près, j'admire en Franconie
Des généraux l'impéritie,
Des projets remplis d'ineptie,
Mal conçus, toujours découverts,
L'ignorance et la barbarie
Conduisant à la boucherie
Nos bataillons percés, ouverts
Par le feu de l'artillerie,

* This passage, and the following one, allude to Frederick the Great, and the Seven Years' War.

Et notre milice affaiblie,
Fuyant comme un troupeau de cerfs
Devant une meute aguerrie;
Ce spectacle indigne humilie.
Ainsi, quand tout va de travers,
Aurai-je l'optimomanie
De ce docteur de Westphalie
Qui, malgré les plus grands revers,
Prétend, en sa rare folie,
Que tout est bien dans l'univers?
Au rebours il me prend envie
D'aller loin des hommes pervers
Passer le reste de ma vie.

It will be remembered that these last verses had already appeared in another production, written by Beaumarchais at the age of thirteen. It appears that he considered them sufficiently good to use them twice. The general tone of this satire against Optimism might give some appearance of reason to the notion—in our opinion far from being justified—which attributes a morose disposition to the author of the "Marriage of Figaro;" but to show that this pessimist diffusion is only a caprice of his imagination, it will be sufficient for us to quote some of the verses which conclude it, and which will show that the pessimist opinions of young Beaumarchais are not very deeply rooted. Here is the conclusion:—

Ami, si je revois Sophie,
Si ses beaux bras me sont ouverts,
Sans perdre ma philosophie,
Permets qu'un instant je m'écrie:
Ah! tout est bien dans l'univers!

No. 2 (page 181).

Letter from Lord Rochford, the English Ambassador in Spain, written in French, to Beaumarchais, at Madrid, in 1764.

Sir,

I have a thousand thanks to offer you for your charming Seguedillas; but what can I do with them, not having the music? Could you oblige me by procuring it? If you will also do me the pleasure of dining with me on Friday, we can try the canon for three voices. We shall be alone, and will do our best to be as happy as possible. If I were ever so little in the good graces of the *belle* who sings so well, I would ask her to come here, but I do not like to risk a refusal, though she would be sorry not to be where you are.* Tell me if I can count upon you, and do me the justice to believe me to be yours very sincerely,

Rochford.

No. 3 (page 185).

Unpublished Letter written to the Duke de la Vallière by Beaumarchais at Madrid, December 24, 1764.

Monsieur le Duc,

I had flattered myself with the vain hope of presenting to you, personally, my humble respects at the beginning of this year; but I am living in a country, where the favourite adage is *poco a poco*. Our vivacity, which

* She was, probably, the same Marchioness de C——, to whom allusion is frequently made in the Beaumarchais' correspondence at Madrid.

frequently degenerates into impatience, is called *la furia francese*, and is quite disregarded; so that in spite of it, all goes on at the ordinary pace. I employ the involuntary leisure which this slowness procures me, in studying, as well as I can, the country in which I live, and the men who inhabit it. Apathy is doubtless their main characteristic; nevertheless, it may be said in their praise, that they are generally well disposed, sober, and extremely patient. In the highest circles personal qualities alone command respect: I do not see that rank gives it to those who have neither weight in public affairs, nor what are called transcendent qualifications. As every one lives at home, with the exception of the assemblies called "Tertulias," which are not assemblies but crowds, and which all frequent, coming and going as into and out of a church; and, as no one is ever invited to dine or sup out, the greatest noblemen are hardly known beyond their own families; the luxury of entertaining a numerous retinue of valets is nevertheless carried to an excess, of which Lucullus alone furnishes an example. The Duc d'Arcos, a captain of the guards, pays at least 100,000 crowns per annum in servants' wages.

The Duc de Medina-Celi carries this extravagance even further, and all the rest of his establishment is rather proportioned to his rank than to his means. This sort of mania makes these people extremely poor in the midst of considerable wealth. A man of your rank, M. le Duc, who, living as a bachelor, and having only an income of 80,000 ducats, would be always embarrassed.

There is no country in the world where the government is so powerful as here; but, as there is no intermediate order between the ministry and the people, to temper the action of legislative and executive power, abuses and authority are often found side by side. Nevertheless, there is no prince who exercises a despotic rule with more moderation than the King of Spain. Whilst he can make his word law, the fear

of committing injustice induces him to submit to forms, whereby affairs are conducted much as they are in other countries, only that a gravity of slowness here marks their process, which is not elsewhere to be found.

The sky is admirably serene, a luxury which I enjoy greatly, more than the natives, who have never suffered the dull, damp winters so common with us. Since the perseverance of the reigning prince in the work of cleansing the city, has overcome the persistence of the Spaniards in living amid filth, this is one of the cleanest cities I have seen. Its streets are good, and it is ornamented with numerous squares and public fountains, albeit more useful to the people than agreeable to the eye of taste. A sharp and appetising air circulates freely everywhere; it is sometimes even so sharp as to kill a man on the spot as he enters an open square; although this has never happened except to some Spaniard exhausted by debauchery and burnt up with vanilla. A superstitious devotion is coupled here with great corruption of morals: it is a false opinion that prevails among us that the Spaniards are jealous; this frenzy may have taken refuge in some of the provincial towns, but no women in the world enjoy so much liberty as those of this capital, and it is not supposed generally that they neglect to take advantage of it.

I have very attentively visited the famous library of the palace of St. Lorenzo, corruptly called the *Escurial*. I think, M. le Duc, I heard M. de Grimaldi say that he had sent you a catalogue of its books and manuscripts. As there is a people here, of much more wit than acquirements, these treasures, so precious to the learned, are in this country but an object of barren curiosity. The cells of the monks who have the guardianship of these books appeared to me better kept, more visited, and their contents more exactly classified. One of these monks, a very honest man, has made me a present of a large and very old Petrarch, which has not beard

enough, nevertheless, to merit a place in the château of Montrouge.* One of the things which struck me most in this very magnificent convent, is the condemnation of almost all the works of our modern philosophers, which is publicly affixed to the choirs of the monks. The proscribed works, as well as their authors, are named, and there appears to be a predilection for your friend Voltaire, for they condemn not only all the works he has produced, but also all that he may produce in future; it being impossible that anything but evil can issue from so abominable a pen. I wrote to him from Bayonne, giving him your commission, and that of M. le Duc de Laval. He was three months without replying to me, and then wrote to my address at Versailles, supposing me to have returned, and not wishing to get me into trouble with the Holy Office by sending his letter here; it reached me, however, safely.

This terrible inquisition, the object of so much horror and public indignation, far from being a despotic and unjust tribunal has become, on the contrary, by the wise precautions which Charles III., the reigning monarch, has taken against its abuses, one of the most moderate tribunals in the world. It is composed not only of ecclesiastical judges, but of a secular council, with the king at its head; the majority of the grandees of the first class fill the other places; and from the perpetual conflict of the views and opinions of all these judges, whose interests are diametrically opposed to each other, the greatest moderation results. This arrangement does infinite honour to the firmness and wisdom of the king, who (as all Europe knows) found it necessary to banish the grand inquisitor—a proceeding till then unheard of. The Spaniards reproach us, and justly, with our *lettres de cachet*, which appears to them the most violent of inquisitions. When we complain of the dilapidated and ruined state of

* The Duc de la Vallière was a great collector of books.

their high roads, they retort on us our *corvées;* a scourge, say they, which is most terrible to the wretched inhabitants of the country, whilst bad roads are merely an inconvenience to travellers. Everything is done in Spain at the expense of the king, which hinders any very rapid progress in public affairs being made, and causes the abandonment of an enterprise, directly a matter of more importance to the government presents itself. But the goodness of the king is so great, that for more than a year he has kept the price of bread in his capital at a very low figure, although, corn being exorbitantly high, he has been obliged, for this purpose, to disburse from his own pocket as much as 100,000 crowns per day. I admire the charity of the king in this particular, more than the providence of his government; but the means of preventing the recurrence of these crises has been since taken seriously into consideration.

Civil justice in this country is encumbered with forms much more complicated than ours, which make it so difficult to obtain, that it is only in the last extremity that any one will have recourse to it. The manner in which law-suits are conducted is decidedly the abomination predicted by Daniel. In civil actions the witnesses are imprisoned before being heard, and should any inoffensive man know by chance that Mr. such a one is a debtor or a legatee, or invested with power, &c. &c., he is forthwith arrested and thrown into prison at the very beginning of the proceedings, that he may declare all that he knows or has heard. I have known (in an affair of accounts, the articles of which had to be verified) three unfortunate men to be confined in a dungeon because they happened to have been found in the house of a man who was examining his accounts when his creditor was present. The rest is of a piece. This department will for a long time to come be badly administered, as so many people live upon its abuses and disorders, and the king knows nothing about it.

To-morrow night the Roman Saturnalia will be renewed in

Madrid. The consumption of edibles and the unbridled licence, called rejoicing, enacted in the churches, on this annual occasion, is incredible; at such a church, the monks dance in the choir to the music of castanets; the people patrol the streets armed with saucepans, whistles, bladders, cymbals, and drums; shrieks, shouts, songs, tumbling, and jumping, all form part of the fête; bacchanals traverse the streets, going from church to church all the night long, and then abandoning themselves to all the excesses suitable to such orgies. During the last eight days a mass has been chanted, accompanied by this diabolic discord in a church close by me, in honour of the birth of our Saviour, who was the best behaved and the quietest of men. In general, all the popular customs here, coming in a straight line of descent from the Moors, have a spirit of unreason and cynicism in them which is not to be met with elsewhere.

Prejudices against everything foreign are carried to an excess in this country by the people, and many distinguished persons are very much the people in this particular. We are the most obnoxious to them; and it must be confessed that the mocking and sarcastic tone of most Frenchmen who visit this country, contribute much to nourish this sort of dislike; we are paid off for our mockery with hatred.

The Spanish theatre is at least two centuries younger than ours, both as regards decency and the plays themselves; it may figure with propriety by the side of those of Hardy and his contemporaries. Their music, on the other hand, may be ranked immediately after the beautiful Italian music, and before our own. The warmth and gaiety of the interludes, all in music, with which they divide the wearisome acts of their insipid dramas, very often compensate for the *ennui* which is produced by listening to them. They are called *tonadillas* or *saynètes*. Dancing is absolutely unknown here. I speak of figure dancing, for I cannot honour with this name the grotesque and often indecent movements of the Moorish

dances, and those of Grenada, which constitute the delight of the people. The most popular of these is the one called the *fandango*, the music of which is extremely lively, while all its charms consist in certain lascivious steps and gestures. As for me, who am not the most demure of men, it has often made me blush up to the temples. A young Spanish girl, with downcast eyes and most modest mien, rises and takes her place before a sturdy jumper; she commences by stretching out her arms and snapping her fingers; and this she continues during the whole *fandango*, to mark the time; the man whirls her round, advances and recedes with violent movements, to which she responds in a like manner, but somewhat more gently, snapping still her fingers, as if to say, "I defy you to it again; I shall not be the first to cry stop." When her partner is knocked up, another takes his place before the damsel, who, if she happen to be a lithesome dancer, will bring down seven or eight men one after the other. There are duchesses, and other *danseuses* of high distinction, whose reputation for the *fandango* is unlimited.

The taste for this obscene dance, which can only be compared to the *calenda* of our negroes in America, is so deeply rooted in this people, that in order to gratify it, some one has written a somewhat comic theatrical piece, in which foreign religionists, reprobating the national taste, and calling it a crime, the question, after being thoroughly debated, is referred to the Pope, to whom a deputation from the nation convey the complaints and wishes of the Spaniards. The Pope assembles the conclave, and, having read the remonstrance of the religionists, is about to condemn the *fandango*, when it occurs to him that he should hear what the Spaniards have to say in their defence; whereupon the deputies beg permission to prove to his Holiness the wickedness of their adversaries, by dancing the *fandango* before the august assembly. Permission being given, the orchestra strikes up, and the deputies commence the dance, which very soon dis-

composes the gravity of the Pope and Cardinals; they are already uneasy in their seats, it is evident they cannot hold out long, they are yielding, the dance gets into their feet, the fury of the *fandango* seizes on them, they join in all its wild movements, till they are all out of breath.

The Pope falls and is picked up, and his Holiness is obliged to confess that the *fandango* is one of the best things he knows of; the deputies return amid the acclamations of the people, amid shouts of joy and hisses—for hisses have not the same meaning here as with us—and a horrible clamour terminates the scene.

I here conclude this letter, which is too long, but of which the amiable *Privé** can give you a very succinct account; for it will not fail to frighten you with its voluminous extent. I beg only that, whatever he may omit, M. Privé will not pass over in silence the assurance of the very profound respect with which I am, M. le Duc,

Yours, &c.,

De Beaumarchais.

P.S.—For the last three months I have had one foot in the boot; next week, however, I positively intend to take the route of Valencia and Barcelona, in order to reach Paris as soon as possible.

No. 4 (page 264).

To the French Comedians at their Assembly.†

Nov. 22, 1779.

Gentlemen,

Of the three pieces which the Directors have accepted, the best constructed, "The Two Friends," has remained for

* Secretary of the Duke.

† Although this letter has been already published in one of the volumes of the "Retrospective Review," we think it necessary to

eight years on the shelf, neither played nor rehearsed. It will soon be thought that you wished to punish this drama for its success in all the French theatres in Europe, by never representing it in your own. The queen, who sometimes takes pleasure in seeing it, could only obtain it from the comedians of the town. I am asked why you do not play it, and knowing not why, I am obliged to pass the word to you.

You can find no more favourable moment, gentlemen, than the present, to test the taste of the capital with respect to this work; for tragedy, in consequence, you know of what,* is somewhat in disorder; and till what I allude to be adjusted by Providence, would it not be well to try what Paris will think of the rough frank virtue of the good Aurelly, and of the noble and vivacious sensibility of the philosopher Mélac?

It is true that this piece is of that bastard and miserable species, which under the name of drama is sought to be proscribed; but the real public, who never proscribe anything that does not weary them, have not yet pronounced their anathema on this interesting kind of representation. If the frightful state of the finances of the kingdom under the late Abbé Terray of terrific memory, and especially the fraudulent bankruptcy of the Jansenist Billard, prevented at one time the Jansenists of the Parterre, the grumblers of the

republish it; first, because it is very little known, and secondly, because it explains the two *unpublished* letters of Monvel and of Mademoiselle Doligny, which we give at the same time.

* The editor of the "Retrospective Review" is quite mistaken in explaining the words—"*attendu ce que vous savey*," by the death of Le Kain. It was not that event, occurring, as it did, on the 8th February, 1778, which threw "tragedy into disorder" in November 1779, that is to say, two years afterwards, but the famous quarrel between two tragic actresses, Mademoiselle Sainval and Madame Vestris, which divided the actors and the public precisely at the time when Beaumarchais wrote his letter.

Bourse, and the losers by the bankruptcy, relishing, as much as they would otherwise have done, a drama founded on the unexpected failure of an honest man, it was because it was conjectured that I had made a public misfortune the subject of my piece.*

But, a change of circumstances having produced a change of sentiments, and the pit being less inclined to Jansenist rigourism, since it has been ruled by Molinists in their silver fringed blue *soutanes*, I think you might put the piece into rehearsal, and give it the chance of the honours of a representation.

M. Preville, for whom the part of Aurelly was written, would, no doubt, exhibit his wonderful talent again in the character.

It is said that M. Brizard has abandoned the first parts in the popular pieces of the day, to confine himself entirely to high tragedy; if so, one must regret the paralysis of the finest moiety of his success as a great actor, and compassionate the public and authors, whom this infirmity deprives, piece after piece, of a good comedian, and by so doing cuts in two the brilliant career of M. Brizard. Should this unfortunately be the case, you must have recourse to M. Vanhove, to represent in the part of Mélac, senior, that half of M. Brizard which no longer exists.

It is possible that the part of Mélac, the son, may appear too juvenile for M. Molé, who has become a first-class tragedian; if so, I would invite M. Monvel, who did not disdain to earn the greatest success in this part in his last

* Beaumarchais here deludes himself as to the causes of the natural failure of a very feeble drama; attributing it to the scandal arising from the fraudulent bankruptcy of a certain Billard, Treasurer of the Post-office, which took place about the same time as the first representation of his drama of "The Two Friends."

tour in the provinces, to condescend to a like success in Paris.

I know not, gentlemen, to whom the part of St Alban, which M. Bellecour used to play, belongs. If M. Molé, his natural successor, does not adopt it, I would beg M. Fleury, who plays with dignity whatever he undertakes, to have the goodness to study it.

As for my little Doligny, she is still my Pauline, my Rosina, my Eugénie; and although she says I am a horrid monster, and that I do not like the Comédie Française, with a thousand other lamentable fibs of the same kind, yet—

> Entre elle et moi, Messieurs, c'est dit;
> Nous ne formons qu'une famille :
> Je suis son père, elle est ma fille,
> Et cela va jusqu'au dédit.

With respect to my poor half-witted *André*, he reminds me very sadly of that charming comedian, that gentle creature, that amiable and honest fellow, Feuilly, whom I loved with heart and soul, at the theatre and in society. As it is not likely that M. Bourette, whom Feuilly had good naturedly deprived of this little part, which he took a fancy to, because it was, he said, so palpably stupid—as it is not likely, I say, that M. Bourette will consent to re-enter into possession of a part so insignificant, and so tardily offered him, I am very certain that, in case of his refusal, my friend Dazincourt would not refuse to fill it up.

This, I believe, is all I have to say. But stop, no; I was forgetting the part of Dabins, which was played, if you recollect, gentlemen, by M. Pin, in a wig so intolerably ridiculous, that the astonished audience took a man of delicate and honourable sentiments for nothing more than a usurer's clerk. I would willingly offer this part to a gentleman

whose name is unknown to me, but whom I have seen perform in tragedy with as much sense as sensibility; provided, that is, that the offer of a part in prose be not regarded at the Comédie Française as an insult to an actor in verse; for I would not wound any one's feelings. I have seen this gentleman play Théramène with great pleasure; and I rather think that he is named Dorval or Dorival.

Now, gentlemen, that you have heard my request, you will oblige me infinitely by giving it a favourable reception, and by doing me the favour to believe me, with all possible consideration, gentlemen, yours, &c.

BEAUMARCHAIS.

Answer from M. Monvel to Beaumarchais in the name of the Comédie Française.

SIR,

We have received your charming letter, and I am directed, in reply to it, to assure you that no pains will be spared to meet your wishes; a task which I undertake with as much alacrity as satisfaction.

We will at once commence the rehearsals of your "Two Friends." Our ardent wish is that you may be ours, and we shall so exert ourselves to this end, that if our efforts should be fruitless the blame will rest with you.

The sort of oblivion (local only) in which your work has remained, is, perhaps, less its fault than that of circumstances. You yourself (it is said) have also neglected it; it is reported that you never said anything as to the revival of this moving drama, played everywhere with a success which reflects upon the capital, with its hasty decisions, and that party spirit which is often directed against the most estimable productions. If there be among us—among the lovers of the "good style," some detractors of this interesting style, which

people condemn while they weep—some enemies of these pieces, so powerfully natural, so moral, so touching, to the representations of which the injudicious public generally rushes in multitudes, I hope the receipts will appease their bile, and disarm their anger; and that they will forgive the author of the "Barber of Seville," and "Eugénie," for having the double talent—that talent so rare—of causing people to laugh and shed tears. All my fellow actors accept most willingly your distribution of the parts. Molé has not yet decided about "Mélac-fils" and "Sant-Alban:" although I know the former part—although I have gained some honour in it—if he wishes to keep it, that of the honest Farmer-General will satisfy my ambition. I shall endeavour to render, as completely as possible, all the elevation of his mind. May I be able to convince you, Sir, by my zeal and activity, that no one more than myself renders justice to the varied and charming talents of which you have given so many proofs, and to that original and piquant character of style, and to the genuine merit of the different works with which you have enriched our literature. I have the honour to be, Sir, with all possible consideration, your very humble and very obedient servant,

Signed, BOUTET DE MONVEL.

November 24, 1779.

Mademoiselle Doligny to Beaumarchais.

SIR,

I cannot thank you too much for all you have said of me in the letter you wrote to the company, on the subject of "The Two Friends." All my fellow actors were enchanted with the liveliness and wit which shine in your letter. I was more delighted than all of them, but especially with your friendship

and kindness. M. de Grammont,* whose good qualities and talents you know, requests me to ask a favour of you, which is to obtain an order for a *début*, or an engagement, from the Directors of the Bordeaux Theatre, for Madame Lenquet, who is at present at Bordeaux. She has been two years at the Italian Theatre, and only left it on account of her husband. M. de Grammont will give you my letter, and will explain the affair to you more in detail. Get something for Madame Lenquet, I entreat you. It is your Eugénie, your Rosina, your Pauline, it is the Countess Almaviva† who solicits you. I venture to hope that you have some regard for their recommendation.

Receive, Sir, the assurance of the esteem, attachment, and gratitude with which I am for life, Sir, your very humble and very obedient servant,

Signed, DOLIGNY.

* This M. *de* Grammont has nothing to do with the illustrious family of that name. He was an actor of the Comédie Française, who after showing some talent in tragic parts, commenced practising tragedy himself, under the Reign of Terror became a fierce Jacobin, and ended on the scaffold.

† The name which Mademoiselle Doligny takes here, in 1779, proves that at this epoch Beaumarchais had at least written the plan of the "Marriage of Figaro," which was not played until 1784, and that he was reserving for Mademoiselle Doligny the part of the Countess Almaviva.

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